

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 30

Ancient Cultivator

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Border Territory 'Eastroad'

A black flying vessel was soaring rapidly through the Endless Territories. Using spacetime transfer arrays might allow you to skip 99% of the journey, but there were still some areas you had no choice but to slowly fly through. The distance would be comparatively short, but you would still need to fly for decades or even centuries.

Aboard the black flying vessel. Ji Ning, Pillsaint, Su Youji were sipping wine and relaxing here.

"Daolord Eastroad died? He was such an incredible Daolord, and yet he died, just like that." Pillsaint shook his head and sighed.

"It is probable that after another 108,000 chaos cycles, every single Daolord of our generation in the Endless territories will be dead! If even two or three can survive, I would be amazed," Su Youji said. To live past 108,000 required you to become an Eternal Emperor, but generally speaking only the weakest, most unremarkable Daolords of the Fourth Step would have a shot at it!

They had very weak Daos, and so they had the best chance at the Daomerge. However... after becoming Eternal Emperors, they would become the punching bags of the Endless Territories! Daolords of great power would furiously chase after them, hoping to kill them in order to make a name for themselves. Thus, all of the weaker Eternal Emperors would soon die. Only the slightly stronger ones or the ones who had special protective abilities would be able to remain alive.

"108,000 chaos cycles is a very, very long period of time. Haha. Ordinary mortals are only able to live a hundred years, while many plants and crops only survive for one harvest." Ning chuckled. "I've been training for far less than even a single chaos cycle; in fact, I'm not even close to 0.01% of a chaos cycle yet. If I can be a dazzling figure for 108,000 chaos cycles, I'll be satisfied. But of course, if I can succeed in my Daomerge and gain eternity, that would be even better."

"Haha, Master, if you succeeded and became an Eternal Emperor, you

would probably become a Hegemon,” Pillsaint said.

“He would definitely be a Hegemon.” Su Youji’s eyes were shining. “I’m excited just imagining him as a Hegemon.”

“Alright, alright. Don’t get too crazy now.” Ning shook his head. Most likely, more than a few of the most talented cultivators all dreamed of becoming Hegemons, but that really was nothing more than a dream. How many would actually be able to succeed?

“Eh?” Ning suddenly nodded slowly. “Time to deal with that Daolord of the Fourth Step.”

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Within Ning’s estate-world. There was a grassy area here with a green-robed alien woman seated within it. She had long, graceful green hair and a pair of silken blue eyes which were filled with worry.

“Master actually died. How could this have happened?” Although Daolord Kongsan had died quite a few days ago, the green-robed woman still felt stunned. She had her own direct connection to Kongsan, and so as soon as he died she immediately knew.

“Master had incredible powers aimed at keeping himself alive. Normal Eternal Emperors would be able to do nothing to him.” The green-robed woman was rather restless and nervous. “Then what should I do? Will that white-robed Daolord kill me?”

“No... I can’t just die like this...” The green-robed woman’s heart was filled with fear. Previously, she had been happy to be captured rather than killed, as that meant the enemy might negotiate with Daolord Kongsan and ransom her. But now that Kongsan was dead... there was no one who would come to save her. Her destiny was completely within Ning’s hands.

Whoosh. A white-robed figure suddenly manifested off in the distance. The green-robed woman couldn’t help but turn her head to look at him, only to see him walk towards her. He said calmly, “From that look on your face, I imagine you already know that Daolord Kongsan is dead. You now have two options. One, I kill you. Two, you submit to me and follow me.”

The green-robed woman's heart unclenched. Her greatest fear was that Ning would kill her without even bothering to speak with her. She hurriedly rose to her feet, then respectfully knelt down in front of Ning. "Naia is willing to submit and forever serve you, Master. All of Naia's magic treasures are yours to take."

"Your magic treasures remain your own." Ning wouldn't go so far as to take the possessions of this new retainer. He smiled. "From this day forth, you shall be my second Daolord retainer. Also – my Daoist monicker is Darknorth. It'd be rather embarrassing if you didn't even know the name of the person you were serving."

"Understood," Daolord Naia said respectfully. In her heart, she repeated the name 'Darknorth' over and over.

From this day forth, Daolord Naia became Ning's retainer as well.

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Daolord Naia swore a lifeblood oath and was then summoned out of the estate-world by Ning to the black flying vessel.

"The three of you should get acquainted with each other." Ning smiled as he pointed at the green-robed woman. "She is Daolord Naia, formerly the eldest disciple of Kongsan. From this day forth, she shall be one of my retainers as well."

"A Daolord of the Fourth Step?"

"A retainer?" Both Pillsaint and Su Youji were rather excited, and they began to engage Daolord Naia in a casual conversation.

Daolord Naia was a taciturn person, but she wasn't a bad person by nature. Ning had purchased the most detailed intelligence report the Skywood Sect had regarding Daolord Kongsan, and so he had naturally learned some information regarding his disciples as well. Kongsan's eldest disciple, Daolord Naia, had been introduced in detail. She had loyally followed and served Kongsan, not causing any trouble or going out of her way to commit sinful deeds. She was a very obedient and loyal subordinate.

“It seems as though she is not a villain by nature. I suppose I can accept it.” This was the reason why Ning had been willing to take her own as a retainer. If she was a very vile person, Ning probably would’ve slain her without a second glance.

And so, Ning led Su Youji, Pillsaint, and Naia on their journey. They first visited the Brightshore Kingdom, making use of its spacetime tunnels to travel to a very remote part of the Endless Territories which was closer to the Eastroad Territory. This was an extremely long journey. Fortunately, Ning had a vessel which flew at a hundred times the speed of light, and had also saved a great deal of travel time by using the Brightshore Kingdom’s spacetime tunnels. And so, after five hundred or so years they finally reached the distant Eastroad Territory.

“The Eastroad Territory. This puts us at the outermost borderlands of the Endless Territories.” The black flying vessel flew out of a chaos star and into the primordial chaos. Ning and the others were aboard the vessel, and they stared at the vast territory before them. This was the Eastroad Territory!

“Master.” Daolord Naia said respectfully, “The Eastroad Territory, as one of the outermost border territories, is a place of great danger. There are also sinister forces hidden here! When Daolord Eastroad was alive, his fame and reputation sufficed to stun and overawe the entire territory, ensuring that those sinister forces wouldn’t dare to cause any trouble. But now that he is dead... I’m afraid his homeland will never be so stable again.”

“This is the reason why his greatest concern was for what would happen to his homeland after he died,” Ning said.

“The borderlands of the Endless Territories...” Ning glanced off into the distance. “Outside the borderlands is the Great Dark, right?”

“Right. The Great Dark.” Daolord Naia nodded.

“An endless sea of darkness... darkness without end...” Pillsaint let out a sigh as well, and Su Youji had a complex look on her face.

The Endless Territories was the region where countless cultivators,

Aberrants, Aeonians, and others all lived. But what was outside of it? Aside from some incredibly dangerous places like the Terror Starsea, outside the Endless Territories lay the endless darkness of the Great Dark. There were no chaos stars there, nor chaosworlds, nor light, nor spacetime transfer arrays. There was nothing more than silent, deathly still darkness. Darkness without end! How long did the darkness stretch? No one knew, because it was simply too vast. Daolords would not dare to traverse it... but Eternal Emperors, who had endless longevity, would.

Emperor Mirrorsnow, Emperor Waveshift, and other mighty figures were all filled with curiosity about the Great Dark, and so they had entered it and began a drifting journey through it. They had unlimited lifespans, which was why they dared do such a thing... but despite that, they had still yet to return.

“More than one Daolord has given it a try,” Ning said softly. “Those Daolords sent their avatars to explore the Great Dark, but to the day they died their avatars were still mired in the endless darkness.”

“How terrifying,” Pillsaint murmured.

“It’s not that terrifying. In the end, the Great Dark is just a dead region,” Daolord Naia said. “By contrast, the Terror Starsea is truly frightening. The Terror Starsea is similarly endless, but it is filled with countless dangers and unlimited possibilities. Not even the three Hegemons dare to barge into it rashly.”

“The Terror Starsea is the number one deathtrap that we know of.” Ning smiled. “But enough of that. When we’re all tired of living, we can go pay the Terror Starsea a little visit. For now, let’s stay away from places we aren’t supposed to visit. Come. Our mission this time is to help Daolord Eastroad pacify his homeland.”

Pacifying this territory would not be an easy feat. This was a borderlands territory, which meant that the Dao Alliance’s influence here was virtually negligible! Some of the surrounding territories being controlled by the Aberrants, the Aeonians, and even some other sinister forces. Some even suspected that outside invaders, such as the Dark Kingdom, were present.

In short, the borderlands were amongst the most chaotic places in all the Endless Territories.

Chapter 2: Danger Lurking Everywhere

The Eastroad Territory. The Eastroad Everworld. A black flying vessel was soaring through the air above the Eastroad Everworld.

“The territories controlled by the Dao Alliance will generally have spacetime transfer arrays within the everworlds.” Pillsaint stood at the prow of the ship, staring at the vast everworld before him. He sighed, “But the Eastroad Everworld doesn’t have a single one. We had to fly for years to get to this place.”

Ji Ning chuckled. It was true that all ordinary everworlds had spacetime transfer arrays. The Badlands Everworld, the Vastheaven Everworld... they all had one. But the Eastroad Everworld did not! It had taken them three years of hard flying after entering the Eastroad Territory before they reached this everworld.

“Let’s go to Eastroad City first,” Ning said. Swoosh! The flying vessel tore through space, blinking through it as it advanced rapidly.

A short while later, the most bustling city within the entire Eastroad Everworld, ‘Eastroad City’, appeared within their field of vision. This was an extremely large city with many cultivators in it.

“Restrain your auras, the three of you,” Ning instructed. “Especially you, Naia. You are a Daolord of the Fourth Step; your aura is going to scare these ordinary cultivators silly.”

“Yes, Master,” Daolord Naia said respectfully. As a Daolord of the Fourth Step, her aura was as vast and boundless as the heavens themselves. With each step Daolords took, they trod the line between life and death. With each breakthrough, their auras would undergo fundamental transformations! Daolords of the First Step and Second Step were fairly weak, and so even if their auras emanated outwards they would at most caused World-level cultivators to feel a sense of pressure. But a Daolord of the Fourth Step would cause them to absolutely quiver in fear!

Whoosh. The flying vessel soared downwards. A short while later Ning put it away, leading Naia, Pillsaint, and Su Youji towards the gates of the

city. There were twelve World-level cultivators at the gates who were standing in two groups to each side, watching the cultivators enter Eastroad City.

“They seem very cautious.” Ning was a bit surprised.

“It might be because this is a borderlands territory, which is why their cities are so strictly guarded,” Su Youji sent mentally.

Ning and the others chatted casually as they entered the city gates. When the twelve World-level cultivators noticed Ning’s group of four, their leader’s face tightened. The leader gestured to a subordinate and said, “Report immediately that four suspicious Daolords have appeared in Eastroad City.”

“Understood.” This subordinate had a clone and so was able to immediately report this to the main sect.

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Ning began to frown as he walked through Eastroad City. “Something is wrong.” Ning could sense that the mood in this city was off. Many of the cultivators were clearly speaking privately to each other through mental messages. Although Ning couldn’t tell what they were saying, he was able to tell that they were doing this.

Ning swept the area with his gaze, only to see several distant Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals who seemed to be sending stealthy mental messages to each other. Ning immediately sent out his godsense, covering them with it. Although he was now a Daolord with powerful godsense, if he tried to use it to scan World-level cultivators they would probably notice something was off. Once they did, they would definitely stop talking.

“The Eastroad Sect is finished.”

“Right. The mighty Eastroad Sect is about to be annihilated, just like that. What a shame.”

“I heard from Master that the founding Patriarch of the Eastroad Sect, ‘Daolord Eastroad’, is already dead. He was someone who stunned and

awed the surrounding territories and ruled over the Eastroad Territory for countless years... but he died, just like that.”

“Logically speaking, the Eastroad Sect should’ve hidden the news that Daolord Eastrod had died. How could word have spread so quickly?”

“Who knows? There has to be some sort of plot behind it. However, the news of him being dead is probably true. Otherwise, the Eastroad Sect wouldn’t act in such a craven fashion.”

This was what the Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals were quietly whispering to each other.

When Ning heard this, his face tightened. What? The information had already leaked out? Factoring in the time they had taken to travel to his place, Daolord Eastroad had died roughly two thousand years ago. To cultivators, two thousand years was an extremely short period of time. Logically speaking, there was no way the Eastroad Sect would’ve so foolishly spread word of this. They would’ve done their best to hide it for as long as they could... but now, even Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals knew of it. It seemed as though word had spread long ago.

“The two of you.” Ning suddenly intercepted two nearby World-level cultivators. With but a thought, he completely sealed off the surrounding area while covering them with a flicker of his murderous sword-intent. However, none of the nearby cultivators were able to even see this happening.

“S-senior.”

The two World-level cultivators were so frightened, their legs went soft. One could imagine how terrifying Ning’s sword-intent was. Their hearts quivered just having that sword-light flicker around them.

“Master?” Su Youji, Pillsaint, and Naia were all rather puzzled.

“You’ll know shortly,” Ning said, then cast his gaze towards the two World-level cultivators before him. “Tell me, what has happened recently in the Eastroad Territory?”

“Senior, did you just arrive here?” The shorter cultivator said hurriedly,

“Something major truly has happened. Roughly one or two thousand years ago, it was suddenly reported that Daolord Eastroad, who ruled over the Eastroad Territory for countless years, has already perished.”

“Who made the report?” Ning asked. One or two thousand years ago? So roughly eight hundred years after his death, the word had been leaked already?

“I don’t know the answer to that,” the short cultivator said.

“You don’t know?” Ning frowned, sending a strand of his baleful intent towards the two. The nearby tall and skinny cultivator hurriedly said, “Maybe the Ninedust Sect!”

“Right!” The shorter cultivator hurriedly agreed, “It is very likely that this information was leaked by the Ninedust Sect. The Ninedust Sect has been applying a great deal of pressure in recent years. It seems as though they intend to take over the Eastroad Territory.”

“The Ninedust Sect?” Ning was startled.

Daolord Eastroad had established the Eastroad Sect and then unified this territory, but the surrounding area was still quite chaotic. There were a number of powerful organizations here, with the most dominating one being the Ninedust Sect. The Ninedust Sect already had nine Daolords when it was first established! By now, its sectlord and three of its vice sectlords were all Daolords of the Fourth Step. However, Daolord Eastroad himself was so overwhelming powerful that the Ninedust Sect was unwilling to offend him, even though they didn’t fear him.

“The Ninedust Sect has been causing a great deal of trouble during the past thousand years, and the Eastroad Sect actually lost one of its Daolords during this period of time. It now only has a single Daolord left,” the short cultivator said.

“Another Daolord of the Eastroad Sect died?” Ning’s face tightened. “Which one?” The Eastroad Sect originally had three Daolords; Daolord Eastroad, Daolord Overgold, and Daolord Thunderheat. Daolord Overgold and Daolord Thunderheat were Daolords of the Third Step, with Overgold being a bit stronger.

“It was Daolord Overgold who died,” the shorter cultivator said. “I heard that he died while adventuring, but for him to die just a few centuries after word spread of Daolord Eastroad’s death... how could there be such a coincidence? It is very likely that the Ninedust Sect sent out major powers to kill him outside.”

“So that means the Eastroad Sect only has one Daolord left?” Pillsaint was rather flabbergasted, while Ning, Su Youji, and Naia were all rather surprised as well.

This had originally been a fairly simple mission, because Daolord Overgold was quite strong; with the formation around their headquarters helping them and some treasures Ning’s group was bringing, he should’ve been able to keep himself alive. Now it seemed the situation was much worse than they had imagined.

“The two of you can leave now,” Ning said. He didn’t really care if these two World-level cultivators told others of this conversation.”

“A-a-alright,” they stuttered.

Ning, Su Youji, Pillsaint, and Naia were all rather irritated and frustrated now. “This is going to be a bit more tricky than we expected.” Ning frowned. “Word of Daolord Eastroad’s death spread less than eight centuries after he died. There’s no way the Eastroad Sect itself would’ve been so foolish as to leak this information. An enemy must have done it, after they acquired this information through Numerancy divination or other intelligence-gathering methods. A short while later, Overgold died while adventuring as well. It might’ve been an actual coincidence, but it’s also possible that he was murdered. If he was murdered... then the real goal was to further weaken the Eastroad Sect.”

“Right.” Pillsaint, Su Youji, and Naia all felt irritated as well.

“Let’s gather some more information first.” Ning continued to advance through Eastroad City, and the more he investigated the more he learned. The Ninedust Sect really was about to take over the Eastroad Territory, and the Eastroad Sect really did only have Daolord Thunderheat protecting it.

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Half a day later.

“For now, go into my estate-world. Otherwise... if multiple Daolords pay a visit, with one being a Daolord of the Fourth Step, the Eastroad Sect will probably be frightened. They are no doubt quite nervous right now,” Ning said to Su Youji and the others.

“Yes, Master.” Su Youji and the other two acknowledged the order. After they entered the estate-world, Ning flew by himself through the air towards the Eastroad Sect.

Just a short while later, the skies around him turned dark as multiple layers of formations around the Eastroad Sect were activated in a dazzling, awesome display of multicolored light.

Ning soon flew to the main gates of the Eastroad Sect, where he was forced to come to a halt.

Chapter 3: Within the Eastroad Sect

“Please stop, Daolord!” The Eastroad Sect’s gate-guarding disciple hurriedly called out to Ji Ning.

Ji Ning smiled as he came to a halt, then said, “Hurry up and send word that I come bearing the last will of Daolord Eastroad. I would like to ask Daolord Thunderheat to come meet with me.”

“You come bearing the will of the old Patriarch?” The gate-guarding disciple was shocked. Could it be that the old Patriarch really had prepared something for them? But why hadn’t he said anything to them before he died? Perhaps it was because he had died so suddenly that his avatar didn’t even have a chance to tell them about it. He immediately said, “Wait here for a brief moment, Daolord. I’ll send word right now.”

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Within the Eastroad Sect.

Daolord Thunderheat had a violet complexion and curly whiskers, making him look like quite a barbarous figure. In reality, he was a very steady and experienced figure who had been running most affairs in the Eastroad Sect for countless years now, while Daolord Eastroad and Daolord Overgold were out adventuring. Who would’ve imagined that both of them would end up perishing, one after the other?

“Ugh.” Whenever Daolord Thunderheat thought of this, he couldn’t help but sigh.

“Master, the Eastroad Sect was built up over the course of countless years. We can’t just abandon our foundation like this.” Two yellow-robed disciples were next to Daolord Thunderheat, and the white-haired one was the one who just spoke.

“Anyone who wishes to destroy the Eastroad Sect will pay a heavy price for it.” The other disciple, a pudgy man who was similarly filled with a baleful look in his eyes, agreed.

Daolord Thunderheat shook his head. “The Patriarch was an incredibly,

freakishly powerful Daolord. Over the course of countless years, he established an incredibly deep and solid foundation for our Eastroad Sect, but... if we want to protect it, in the end we'll have to rely on our own power. The Ninedust Sect is just worried about some desperation attacks that we might unleash, which is why they've only been threatening us while not actually attacking us. But as more time passes... in the end, sooner or later we will be annihilated."

"Master..." The two disciples felt both rage and grief.

"The two of you are merely at the World level. You don't understand how terrifying the Ninedust Sect is." Daolord Thunderheat sighed. "Especially Daolord Ninedust himself. He was close to being on par with even the old Patriarch himself."

The two disciples ground their teeth, unwilling to accept this. The exalted Eastroad Sect had been dazzling and glorious for so many years. Everyone in the surrounding territories had always feared and respected them, with even the mighty Ninedust Sect going out of its way to avoid causing them trouble. But now, with their great sheltering tree gone, the Eastroad Sect was about to tumble.

"Uncle-Master!" Suddenly, a disciple came running towards them. He came to a halt outside the door, then said with breathless excitement, "Uncle-Master, an unfamiliar Daolord has arrived. He said he came bearing the will of the old Patriarch and wishes to meet with you."

"What?!" Daolord Thunderheat suddenly rose to his feet while looks of excitement appeared on the faces of his two yellow-robed disciples. "He came bearing the will of the old Patriarch?" Daolord Thunderheat felt excitement as well. The existence of their sect, and in fact their entire clan, had been due to Daolord Eastroad! The reason why Thunderheat and Overgold had been able to become Samsara Daolords was partially because of Daolord Eastroad's guidance. As a result, Daolord Eastroad's status in the sect was extremely, extremely high.

The white-haired disciple next to him said with delight, "Master, the old Patriarch must have made arrangements before he died."

“Don’t be impatient. Let me go out and take a look first.” Daolord Thunderheat felt eager as well. His body flickered as he immediately flew out of the door.

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Outside the main gates of the Eastroad Sect. Daolord Thunderheat immediately saw the white-robed youth bearing that black scabbard on his back who was standing outside the main gates. The white-robed youth’s aura was indeed that of a Daolord’s.

“Eh?” Daolord Thunderheat frowned. The white-robed youth’s aura seemed to be even weaker than Thunderheat’s own aura. He was probably a Daolord of the Second Step.

“Daolord.” Daolord Thunderheat stepped forwards and spoke out to Ning. As for Ning, he saw a figure suddenly appear within the barrier formations surrounding the sect. It was an extremely muscular man.

“Are you Daolord Thunderheat?” Ning asked.

“I am. Dare I ask who you are, fellow Daoist?” Daolord Thunderheat said.

“I am Darknorth.” Ning smiled. “Can we chat inside? Shall you invite me in?”

“Oh, r-right. Please come in.” Daolord Thunderheat’s mind was in a state of chaos right now, which was why he had forgotten even the basic courtesies of welcoming guests. He hurriedly led Ning into the Eastroad Sect.

Within a courtyard inside the Eastroad Sect. A female attendant delivered a flagon of Immortal wine. Daolord Thunderheat sat to one side, with two yellow-robed attendants standing next to him. Ning sat to the other side. Ning was quite relaxed as he drank the wine. He let out a praiseful sigh, then said “What a wonderful flavor.”

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth.” Daolord Thunderheat couldn’t help but ask, “Didn’t you say you came bearing our old Patriarch’s will?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “With regards to this matter, I have to mention my senior apprentice-brother Daolord Soleman.”

“Daolord Soleman?” Daolord Thunderheat was startled upon hearing this. He had naturally heard the Patriarch speak of Soleman. Soleman and the Patriarch had definitely been good friends, and Soleman had perhaps been only on par with the Patriarch in power, but as a Heartforce Cultivator he had far more bizarre and inscrutable techniques. In the Endless Territories, Soleman definitely had a higher status than Eastroad had.

Ning nodded. “Daolord Eastroad was on an adventure with my senior apprentice-brother Daolord Soleman, as well as Daolord Skyaxe. They ended up in a dire situation. Skyaxe and Soleman managed to survive, but Daolord Eastroad was just a bit unlucky and ended up losing his life.”

“Ah.” Daolord Thunderheat revealed a look of pain and sorrow, and the two yellow-robed disciples by his side quivered, their hearts filled with pain, sorrow, and regret. Why was it that the other two had survived while their Patriarch had died?

“All three of them knew that it was possible they would perish, and so they all left behind wills for the survivors to carry out,” Ning explained. “Before Daolord Eastroad died, his greatest and only concern was for his homeland. After the other two survived and escaped, they asked me to help deliver some treasures to the Eastroad Sect. Take a look and see if they will be of assistance to you.”

Ning tossed out a storage bracelet, one which Daolord Soleman had used to store various magic treasures. Swoosh. The bracelet flew before Daolord Thunderheat, who accepted it rather excitedly. He quickly bound it, then began to scan the items within as the two yellow-robed disciples behind him waited impatiently.

Just a short while later, Daolord Thunderheat put away the bracelet with a rather mixed expression on his face. This bracelet had also contained a talisman from Daolord Eastroad, one which all three Daolords had left behind with each other.

“And?” Ning asked.

“Seniors Soleman and Skyaxe left behind quite a few treasures.” Daolord Thunderheat sighed. “They even included two Dao-seals of incredible power; both of them created one, and I can tell they poured many resources and energy into each. There are also a number of formations and other things. In a normal situation, they would be enough for us to protect the Eastroad Sect... but our enemy is now the Ninedust Sect.”

“Master, is it still not enough?” The two yellow-robed disciples behind him grew nervous.

“The Ninedust Sectlord is close to Soleman and Skyaxe in power. Even if they came in person, they would at most be able to defeat the sectlord but probably be unable to kill him.” Daolord Thunderheat continued, “Just two Dao-seals... they might be enough to kill ordinary Daolords of the Fourth Step, but they absolutely wouldn’t be of any use against the Ninedust Sectlord.”

Ning nodded. the Ninedust Sectlord was most likely on Kongsan’s level of power. He was slightly weaker than Skyaxe and Soleman, but would be able to stay alive if attacked by them.

“Fellow Daoist Thunderheat, is the Ninedust Sect truly preparing to move against the Eastroad Sect?”

“Yes.” Daolord Thunderheat let out a hate-filled growl. “Brother Overgold was killed by the Ninedust Sect.”

“What?” Ning’s face tightened.

“Brother Overgold’s avatar personally told me this just before he died.” Daolord Thunderheat said with hatred, “Unfortunately, when he was attacked he was very, very far away from the Eastroad Sect. There was no way for us to save him. But of course... I wouldn’t have been able to do so regardless.”

Ning had a solemn look on his face. So it was indeed the Ninedust Sect which had killed Daolord Overgold? Everything was now quite clear.

“My clansmen have been evacuated quite some time ago, to ensure that

our line won't be completely extinguished." Daolord Thunderheat said softly, "As for us... no matter what, we've sworn to defend this place to the death. This is our home, the place where we have lived for countless years. We'll rely on the formations protecting the formation as well as the treasures the old Patriarch left behind. In the end, we'll ensure that the Ninedust Sect will lose a few teeth as they devour our clan."

"We're going to fight to the death," the two yellow-robed disciples said furiously.

Cultivators sought their own Daos, their own paths. Once they chose to fight to the death, they would be truly fearless.

"Gentleman." Ning spoke out. "I've already promised senior apprentice-brother Soleman and the others that I will ensure the safety and security of your homeland."

Daolord Thunderheat and the others stared at Ning, startled.

"Since I've promised it, I'll carry my promise out." Ning said calmly, "There's no need for you to worry about the Ninedust Sect. I'll handle everything!"

"You'll handle everything?" Daolord Thunderheat and the others stared at this Daolord of the Second Step in astonishment.

Ning waved his hand. Whoosh. Three figures suddenly appeared by his side, each with the aura of a Daolord. They were Pillsaint, Su Youji, and Daolord Naia. Daolord Naia's aura was particularly overwhelming.

"Master," Daolord Naia, Su Youji, and Pillsaint said respectfully.

Daolord Thunderheat and his two disciples stared at them in astonishment. A Daolord of the Fourth Step was respectfully calling a Daolord of the Second Step 'master'?

Ning glanced at Daolord Thunderheat. "Fellow Daoist Thunderheat, I didn't realize how grim the situation was. However, since I've promised senior apprentice-brother Soleman to handle this, I will! If the Ninedust Sect dares to attack, I'll kill as many as they come!"

Chapter 4: The Void Pathway

Daolord Thunderheat and his two yellow-robed disciples were all rather stunned. These words were a bit too dominating. Kill as many as they come?

“F-Fellow Daoist Darknorth...” Daolord Thunderheat felt both eagerness and nervousness. “Are you saying that this lady Daolord will be able to resist the Ninedust Sect?” As he spoke, he glanced at Daolord Naia.

“Her name is Naia,” Ning said. When Daolord Thunderheat heard her name, he felt a cold feeling crawl past his heart. This was a name he had never heard before! Although he rarely went out adventuring, he knew almost all of the truly famous figures. This meant Daolord Naia wasn’t all that famous.

“Greetings, Daolord Naia. May I ask, if you are supported by the formations which protect my Eastroad Sect, will you be able to defeat the Ninedust Sectlord?” Daolord Thunderneat asked.

“Even with the formations helping me, I would probably be defeated and slain by him in a single strike,” Daolord Naia said.

“Ah.” Daolord Thunderheat was flabbergasted. Daolord Naia was telling the truth; the Ninedust Sectlord was on the same level as Daolord Kongsan. Naia couldn’t even withstand a single strike from Ning, who in turn didn’t dare to fight Daolord Kongsan in close combat. There was an enormous and obvious difference in power between ordinary Daolords of the Fourth Step and the truly freakishly powerful ones. The Ninedust Sectlord was one of the latter.

“Senior Darknorth, didn’t you just say that you would kill as many as come?” The white-haired disciple couldn’t help but ask this question.

“I did say just that.” Ning nodded. “But I meant, I would kill them personally.”

“Uh?”

“Personally?”

Daolord Thunderheat and the others all stared at Ning. “It isn’t that I look down upon you, fellow Daoist... but if my judgment is correct, you should be a Daolord of the Second Step,” Daolord Thunderheat said.

“Yes. A Daolord of the Second Step.” Ning nodded.

“A Daolord of the Second Step, fight against the Ninedust Sectlord?” Daolord Thunderheat couldn’t help but shake his head. Daolords trod a line between life and death with each step, and the difference in power between each step was very apparent. Someone at the second step, challenge someone who was at the fourth step? The Ninedust Sectlord himself was a freakishly powerful Daolord, even amongst his peers at the fourth step. Ning, defeat him? The prospects were remote.

But Daolord Naia said coldly, “My master defeated me in a single blow.”

Daolord Thunderheat and his two disciples were badly shocked by this.

“In the outside world, I probably wouldn’t be a match for the Ninedust Sectlord. But if I was in the Eastroad Sect’s base? I trust that Daolord Eastroad personally established the formations protecting this place, and that they possess extraordinary power. With it reinforcing me, I won’t fear him at all.” Ning chuckled.

“Yes, yes! The old Patriarch personally established all of the formations around the Eastroad Sect, and they truly are incredible.” Daolord Thunderheat felt both excited and ashamed. “Please pardon me, fellow Daoist. I previously didn’t dare imagine that you would be as powerful as this.”

“Generally speaking, even the most freakishly talented of Daolords of the Second Step wouldn’t be at this level of power. I only am due to certain special secret arts,” Ning said casually.

“Secret arts are part of your power as well.” Daolord Thunderheat was extremely excited. Hope! He finally saw hope. He certainly didn’t believe that Ning was nothing more than issuing empty boasts. No one who was capable of making a Daolord of the Fourth Step would be so foolish, because the consequences would arrive alongside the Ninedust Sectlord... and the consequences would be fatal. Thus, it seemed likely that this

'Darknorth' fellow really was capable of handling things.

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A short while later, Daolord Thunderheat prepared a sumptuous banquet for Ning and the others. After the banquet concluded, Daolord Thunderheat personally escorted Ning away.

"Fellow Daoist," Daolord Thunderheat said softly, "If you were to break through to the third step, would your chances of defeating the Ninedust Sectlord improve?"

"A Daolord of the Third Step?" Ning chuckled as he glanced at Daolord Thunderheat. "If I can reach the third step, my chances will greatly improve. In that situation, even without the assistance of the Eastroad Sect's formations I still wouldn't need to fear him. In fact, I might even be able to kill him."

Ning wasn't just bragging. If he truly did break through from the first step and become a Daolord of the Second Step... given the power of his Omega Sword Dao, he really would become on par with the likes of Daolord Kongsan and the Ninedust Sectlord. In addition, his Omega Sword Dao was flawlessly perfect in every aspect, making it absolutely perfect for actual combat. So long as the opponent did not flee and chose to continue the fight, the end result would definitely be the opponent getting the worst of it! But of course, no one would be so foolish as to stand there and get beaten down like that. Clever Daolords like Kongsan would retreat as soon as the situation turned south for them.

The reason why he hadn't been able to flee was because the Hegemon's Dao-seal was simply too powerful, causing even spacetime to be bound and suppressed. Daolord Kongsan had used two life-saving treasures in a row without being able to escape. It wasn't that his fleeing abilities were weak, it was simply that the Dao-seal was far too powerful. It would have been easy for him to flee from most Daolords he battled.

"Then how long would it take you to break through to become a Daolord of the Third Step, fellow Daoist?" Thunderheat asked.

"I'm not too far off," Ning said. To go from the first step to the second

step was quite quick, and to go from the second step to the third step didn't take that long either. Reaching the fourth step, however, was a very long process. As for succeeding in the Daomerge and gaining Eternity? Chances were slim, no matter how much time you took.

"Alright." Daolord Thunderheat clenched his teeth. "Fellow Daoist Darknorth, the Eastroad Sect has a sect-guarding treasure which the old Patriarch brought back from the Terror Starsea."

Ning's eyes lit up. Something from the Terror Starsea?

"Technically speaking, I shouldn't divulge its existence to outsiders. However, I am now the sole master of the Eastroad Sect, which is now facing an existential crisis. I'm going to ignore those rules." Daolord Thunderheat looked at Ning. "This supreme treasure is known as the Void Pathway, and it is extremely beneficial to cultivators. Perhaps, fellow Daoist, you will be able to seize this opportunity to break through to become a Daolord of the Third Step."

Daolord Thunderheat was simply too worried. He hoped that Darknorth would be able to grow even more powerful, as this matter would have an impact on the life and death of the Eastroad Sect.

"Void Pathway?" Ning couldn't help but begin to feel curious.

"Follow me," Daolord Thunderheat said solemnly.

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Daolord Thunderheat led the way, while Ning followed from behind. Thunderheat dispelled one formation after another as he guided Ning to a seemingly ordinary courtyard.

"Do you see that?" Daolord Thunderheat pointed at a decorative sculpture of a mountain located in the corner of the courtyard. The 'mountain' even had some vines and 'trees' growing from it.

"What about it?" Ning was puzzled. There was nothing unusual about that artificial mountain. In fact, he couldn't sense any formations from it at all. Daolord Thunderheat stepped forward, then waved his hand. The vines instantly were reduced to dust, revealing what was hidden beneath

them. This 'mountain' actually had a sculpted stone 'door' on it!

"Is that a doorway?" Ning was puzzled.

"Yes. A door. A door that you can open," Daolord Thunderheat said.
"Daolord Darknorth, please follow me."

Daolord Thunderheat walked towards one of the sculpted stone doors, then pressed his hand upon it. Instantly, the doorway split open with a rumbling sound, revealing a deep, dark tunnel beneath it. The entrance to this tunnel ebbed and flowed with spatial ripples.

Ning was surprised. Prior to the stone door opening, this had seemed like nothing more than a very ordinary sculpture of a mountain. He hadn't sensed any thing special or magical about it at all... but it now had a dimensional hallway within it.

"Come in." Daolord Thunderheat turned to look at Ning, then stepped inside. Ning followed him without hesitation.

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Whoosh. Space twisted and flowed around Ning as a dazzling, glowing golden region appeared before him.

"What's this?" Ning and Daolord Thunderheat were standing within a long walkway. The floor was black, and the walkway itself was hanging in empty space, with nothing but the void on each side of the walkway.

"This is the Void Pathway. Everything around this golden region is just empty space; the only thing here is this Void Pathway hanging in space." Daolord Thunderheat pointed towards the front. This walkway was an extremely long one, stretching off at least ten million kilometers. In front of the walkway stood a number of armored soldiers and guards. Ning's visual prowess allowed him to clearly see to the very end of the walkway, where there was a royal golden throne.

"There are a total of thirty thousand soldiers here," Daolord Thunderheat said. "Once you begin advancing through the Void Pathway, you will be impeded by these soldiers. The deeper you go, the more terrifyingly powerful the soldiers will be."

“Oh?” Ning revealed a smile. This seemed quite similar to the Brightshore Kingdom’s ‘Daolord Cloudworld’.

“These soldiers have very unique combat Daos. Very, very unique.” Daolord Thunderheat looked at Ning. “You’ll see for yourself when you fight them. The weakest of them are comparable to Daolords of the Second Step, which is why only the Daolords of the Eastroad Sect are permitted to enter it.”

“Did Daolord Eastroad manage to reach the throne?” Ning asked.

“The old Patriarch tried twice. He failed the first time. He later gained certain insights, then went all out in a second attempt and managed to succeed. The two final soldiers are all comparable to him in power,” Daolord Thunderheat said.

Ning was stunned. This was much more impressive than the Daolord Cloudworld. Anyone who had reached the threshold of power for a Daolord of the Fourth Step would be able to battle their way to the very end of the Daolord Cloudworld, but it seemed as though this place required the trial taker to be comparable to Daolord Eastroad in power. Daolord Eastroad was already comparable to the weaker Eternal Emperors. How was it that these guards were as powerful as this?!

“Unfortunately, there’s no way to bring out even one of these thirty thousand soldiers. In fact, there’s no way to control them at all.” Daolord Thunderheat sighed. “If there was, why would we worry about the Ninedust Sect?”

Ning nodded, his gaze focused on the golden throne at the end of the walkway. “What happens once you reach the throne? Anything good?”

“A legacy,” Daolord Thunderheat said. “The old Patriarch didn’t tell me in detail, and so I imagine that the so-called legacy wouldn’t be all that interesting to freakishly strong Daolords like yourself.”

Ning chuckled. He had the legacy of the Sword Hegemon and the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] of the Paragon of Pills. There really weren’t many legacies that would interest him.

“However, when those thirty thousand soldiers fight against you, you’ll benefit from the insights into the Dao you will gain.” Daolord Thunderheat sighed. “Even the old Patriarch benefited from his first attempt, resulting in him becoming much more powerful.”

Chapter 5: Ten Thousand Years of Cultivation

Ji Ning nodded, then suddenly asked, “Fellow Daoist Thunderheat, might I ask if my retainers can enter as well?”

Daolord Thunderheat let out a pained laugh. “Fellow Daoist Darknorth, the Void Pathway is the most important treasure of the entire Eastroad Sect. You have vowed to save our entire sect, and the debt we owe you is endless! Your retainers and your closest friends can all make the attempt as well, but I ask that you not divulge anything about it at all.”

Ning was briefly startled, then nodded. “I swear on my very life itself that aside from my retainers, I will not speak of the Void Pathway to anyone else.” His voice echoed within the void and within his very own soul. This was a lifeblood oath.

“That wasn’t necessary. The Eastroad Sect trusts you fully, fellow Daoist Darknorth,” Daolord Thunderheat said hurriedly. In reality, however, he couldn’t help but let out a sigh of relief. He did want Ning to swear a lifeblood oath, but he was also begging Ning to prevent his entire sect from being wiped out, which was why he had never proactively mentioned any oaths.

“It was only proper,” Ning said casually. He could tell what the man was thinking. Still, he really wasn’t all that concerned about this opportunity. The cultivators of the Three Realms had their own opportunities to exploit.

“Those three retainers of mine will never spread this information either. I’ll have them swear oaths as well,” Ning said.

“Um...” Daolord Thunderheat chuckled. “Then I won’t bother you any further. Whenever you wish to leave, fellow Daoist, you only need to turn back and you’ll be able to depart.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded, and Daolord Thunderheat departed. Ning chuckled and shook his head. The fewer treasures one had, the more one

would value them! Ning had acquired all of Daolord Kongsan's treasures, and had the Sword Hegemon's Dao-seal. Although this Void Pathway was a unique treasure, it wasn't enough to make Ning feel the slightest bit greedy. Ning also knew that the more powerful he became, the more treasures he would have in the future. In the future, this Void Pathway would be even less meaningful than it was right now.

"But let me take a look and see what's so special about this thing." Ning stepped forwards, moving tens of thousands of kilometers in an instant.

Rumble...

An enormous globe of golden light suddenly appeared high in the void above the golden region. The globe of light unleashed two streaks of golden light which shot into the bodies of the two armored warriors directly in front of Ning. Golden light immediately began to shine out of the armored soldiers eyes.

Boom! Boom! The two armored soldiers hoisted their weapons as they transformed into streaks of light, charging towards Ning. "Die!" One of them stabbed out with a long spear, sending it piercing through the skies.

"Kill!" The other armored soldier lashed out with a long whip which moved like a long, agile serpent. These two armored soldiers worked in concert, one charging forward valiantly while the other moved with crafty agility. They moved in perfect harmony, as though they were part of a greater whole.

Ning revealed a smile. "Interesting. No wonder Thunderheat said that these soldiers fight in a very unique manner; they actually have employ a battle-formation Dao, and are able to work together wonderfully..."

Boom! With but a thought, Ning caused his sword-intent to manifest. His sword-intent swept out in an overwhelming wave, smashing against the two soldiers and sweeping them off their feet, then sending them flying.

The difference in power was simply far too greater. These two soldiers were just barely comparable to ordinary Daolords of the Second Step.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Ning blew through the soldiers like rotting wood, continuing to advance through the pathway. Only after defeating 18,000 soldiers did he finally begin to slow down.

“What a strange feeling.” Ning was surrounded and being attacked by eight soldiers. These eight soldiers used different weapons and different attack styles. Hard, soft, insidious, straightforwards... every single soldier was extremely dedicated to one type of combat style. And yet, they were able to work together through their battle-formation. Ning felt as though he was fighting a major power who was a mastery of many different types of weapons. This was quite a taxing fight.

“The Dao of Wind? The Dao of Lightning? The Dao of Water?” Ning was growing increasingly excited by this battle. As for the globe of light, it continued to hang there in the void. Each time Ning defeated a soldier, it would shoot out even more golden light and activate even more powerful soldiers.

“That light globe should serve as the core of the entire Void Pathway.” Ning lifted his head up to glance at the light globe. All of the soldiers were unliving and inanimate things, but once the light shone down upon them they were given incredible amounts of power.

“The items that can be found in the Terror Starsea truly are marvelous.” Ning was feeling increasingly curious about the Terror Starsea, but it was simply too dangerous a place; not even the three mighty Hegemons dared to go too deep into that place. It was so terrifying that even they stood a chance of dying if they went too far in.

.....

Time flew on. Ten thousand years went past in the blink of an eye. To cultivators, ten thousand years was actually a very short period of time. The entire Eastroad Sect remained in a state of disarray and fear of the Ninedust Sect's arrival.

During the past ten thousand years, Pillsaint had focused intently on training in the Dao of Alchemy. As a result, he had finally broken through to become a Daolord of the Second Step. With the first six chapters of the

[Seven Leafpill Chapters] serving to guide him, he knew exactly how to progress in his Dao and so made incredibly rapid improvements.

The main hall of the Eastroad Sect.

“What will be, will be.” Daolord Thunderheat’s face turned solemn after he heard his disciple’s reports. A group of disciples had already been gathered here within the hall.

“The Ninedust Sect has finally arrived.” The disciples all felt nervousness in their hearts.

“Lead him in,” Daolord Thunderheat instructed.

“Yes.” The disciple who was responsible for bringing word from outside immediately departed. As he did, Daolord Thunderheat’s avatar appeared in front of the sculpture of a mountain, pushed the ‘door’ open, and entered the Void Pathway.

There was a battle going on in the empty void of space directly above the actually pathway. It was Daolord Naia and Flamefairy Su Youji battling each other! There was a thatched cottage at one end of the area, and Ning was seated in the lotus position within it as he meditated silently. Ning had spent almost the entirety of the past ten thousand years within the Void Pathway. He would often go out to engage in battle, then use his spacetime cottage to train and reflect on his insights.

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth.” Daolord Thunderheat’s avatar walked over, then called out to to Ning. Within the cottage, Ning opened his eyes and smiled. “What is it, Daolord Thunderheat?”

“An envoy from the Ninedust Sect has arrived,” Daolord Thunderheat said.

“The Ninedust Sect? They’ve finally come.” A cold glint flashed through Ning’s eyes. He rose to his feet, walked out of the cottage, then waved his hand and put it away.

“The two of you can keep training here. I’ll go take a look,” Ning said loudly.

“Yes, Master.” Su Youji and Daolord Naia both called back loudly.

“Let’s go.” Ning immediately accompanied Daolord Thunderheat in leaving.

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One of the side halls of the Eastroad Sect had been set up to welcome the Ninedust Sect’s envoy. A large number of Eastroad Sect disciples had already gathered here. As for Ning, he was brought in through a side door. He quietly sat down in the back row and watched silently.

“Envoy of the Ninedust Sect, why have you come to the Eastroad Sect?” Daolord Thunderheat spoke out from his position atop the high seat.

“Simple.” The fiery-armored figure standing before him said coldly, “We’re here giving you a chance to stay alive. If you immediately evacuate the Eastroad Territory, all of you will be able to stay alive! But if you fight back, you will be wiped out.”

“Damn him.”

“He dares...”

Instantly, the disciples within the hall all began to roar and shout with fury. They hadn’t imagined that the Ninedust Sect would act in such a brash manner.

“It was the Sectlord who personally told me to convey this message. Either you get the hell out of the Eastroad Sect or you die.” The fiery-armored man said coldly, “I’ve delivered my message. It is up to you what choice you will make. Ten years from now, if the Eastroad Sect is still present in this region, then you can simply wait for death.” Message delivered, he turned and left.

“He wants to leave, just like that?”

“Stop right th-...” An enraged disciple of the Eastroad Sect moved to block his path.

“Let him leave,” Daolord Thunderheat said coldly. The Eastroad disciples had no choice but to swallow their rage.

“Hmph. I train in a cloning technique. Even if you killed me, it would be meaningless.” The fiery-armored man let out a cold laugh, then left with a swagger.

Daolord Thunderheat just watched him leave silently. He wasn’t going to get angry with a World-level cultivator; it was the Ninedust Sectlord he was angry with!

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth.” Daolord Thunderheat looked at the seated Ning.

“I saw everything.” Ning nodded and smiled. “Let them come. I’ve been waiting over ten thousand years here for the Ninedust Sect to come.”

Daolord Thunderheat relaxed slightly. “Your words put me at ease, fellow Daoist.”

Chapter 6: Battling Alone

A towering ray shrine was floating there within the dark void of chaotic space, and an awe-inspiring group of cultivators were inside it.

At the highest place within the shrine sat a silver-masked, silver-robed man. He was the Ninedust Sectlord, and his name was known throughout the many territories of the nearby region. Countless living beings prostrated themselves before him and lived on his suffrage, and his vileness and his power had long ago been made known to the cultivators around him, inspiring terror in their hearts.

Below him stood three figures who were the three vice sectlords of the Ninedust Sect.

“Sectlord.” Daolord Graceful, one of the three vice sectlords, spoke out. “The ten years have concluded, but the Eastroad Sect has refused to leave. What should we do?”

“Do you really need to ask? Of course we are going to attack. We’re going to wipe them out!” Daolord Bruteflame, who had a stone-like body, roared angrily, “Without Daolord Eastroad, how can the Eastroad Sect possibly contend against our Ninedust Sect?”

“Hmph.” The graceful and handsome Daolord Cleversoul frowned as he barked, “Bruteflame, Ptariarch Eastroad was an extraordinarily powerful figure, and his lair is undoubtedly filled with many terrifying formations. We gave coercion a shot, and if we succeeded it would have been nice, but... attack by force? Hmph. Only the Sectlord himself has a shot at that. All three of us would be at risk of dying if we tried.”

The three vice sectlords were Daolords of the Fourth Step, with Daolord Cleversoul being the strongest and the other two being weaker.

“Enough.” The Ninedust Sectlord said in a cold voice, “Since they have refused to leave, we’ll take them out.”

The three vice sectlords, especially Daolords Cleversoul and Graceful, were all startled. Daolord Cleversoul barked, “The rest of you, retire for a

moment.”

“Understood.” The other Daolords and World-level cultivators standing below them all departed, despite feeling puzzled.

“Sectlord.” Daolord Cleversoul raised his head to look at the Ninedust Sectlord. “Sectlord, are you perhaps being a bit too fixated on the Eastroad Sect? You first slew one of their Daolords, then moved the entire shrine over to the Eastroad Everworld to keep an eye over it... and now, you plan to attack it by force! The Eastroad Sect is already incredibly weak; we only need to besiege it, not actually attack it. Eventually, they will have to come out, unless they choose to never test themselves and never go out adventuring. If that is the case, then their sect will grow weaker and weaker over time. In a few chaos cycles, they’ll be finished. Why must we take the risk of attacking by force?”

“Agreed. Sectlord, are we perhaps being a bit too hasty?” Daolord Graceful asked. They all felt that this was a bit too impetuous. They could just take over the entire Eastroad Territory while keeping the Eastroad Sect trapped here! However, the Sectlord insisted on actually attacking.

“Hm. Now that the old Sectlord has passed away, the three of you must feel that I’m the easygoing, merciful type, yes? You believe there is no need to obey my orders, mm?” The Ninedust Sectlord’s voice was as cold as ice.

“We wouldn’t dare,” the three vice sectlords said respectfully.

“Since you do not dare to disobey, go and carry out my orders. Head out to the Eastroad Sect,” the Ninedust Sectlord barked.

“Acknowledged.” The three vice sectlords had no choice but to obey the order.

“Head out to the Eastroad Sect.” Soon, the order spread to the entire sect, and the towering gray shrine began to fly ever-closer to the Eastroad Everworld.

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Rumble...

The towering gray shrine pierced through the world-membrane of the Eastroad Sect, then soared through its skies like an enormous levitating mountain as it moved straight to the Eastroad Sect. It made no effort to disguise or hide what it was doing at all.

“That’s the Ninedust Sect’s shrine.”

“The Ninedust Shrine of the Ninedust Sect.”

Quite a few cultivators within the Eastroad Everworld raised their heads to stare at it, their hearts filled with shock. They knew that something big was about to happen!

“Move, move, move! Head out right away!”

“Let’s go to the Eastroad Sect and watch what happens from a safe distance. This battle between the Ninedust Sect and the Eastroad Sect will be the biggest fight in many chaos cycles in these territories. There’s no way we can miss it.”

“The Eastroad Sect is probably going to be wiped out. There’s no way we can miss this spectacle. Given what a deep foundation the Eastroad Sect has accumulated over the years, it probably won’t die without a fight. I’m guessing that one or two of the Daolords of the Ninedust Sect will die as well.”

These cultivators all chatted excitedly amongst themselves as they quietly flew towards the Eastroad Sect, preparing to watch this battle. If they missed a fight like this, they would be filled with endless regrets.

.....

“They are coming.”

“The Ninedust Sect is coming.”

“The Ninedust Sect has brought its main base, the Ninedust Shrine.” Word quickly spread like wildfire within the Eastroad Sect, and it was filled with a hubbub of commotion. Many of its disciples were shocked and restless. Although they had long ago known that a day like this would come, and that someone known as Daolord Darknorth had come to assist

them... they couldn't help but feel nervous and fearful now that the day had finally arrived.

The Ninedust Sect's power was simply too great! Its fame and its might were all legendary throughout the nearby territories.

"Fellow Daoist Darknorth! Fellow Daoist Darknorth!" Daolord Thunderheat headed straight to the Void Pathway to ask Ning to assist.

"Have they arrived?" Ning, Pillsaint, Su Youji, and Naia all came out.

"The main base of the Ninedust Sect, the 'Ninedust Shrine', is flying straight towards us." Daolord Thunderheat cleared his throat, obviously rather nervous. "They aren't trying to do a blitzkrieg through teleportation or anything sneaky; they are just flying straight towards us! I imagine many cultivators have already noticed them. The Ninedust Sect is completely confident in its chances."

Ning nodded. "No need to panic. From this moment forwards, you must obey all my orders."

"Alright." Daolord Thunderheat nodded.

"I'll go meet the Ninedust Sect outside our sect." Ning smiled.

"Outside the sect?" Daolord Thunderheat was shocked. "You can't. If you go outside, you won't be protected by the formations."

"If I am not a match for them, then I'll naturally retreat into the protective embrace of the Eastroad Sect's formations." Ning smiled. "Don't worry. I won't get in over my head."

Unable to dissuade Ning, Daolord Thunderheat could only say, "Fellow Daoist Darknorth, you must be careful."

"I'll leave the defenses and formations protecting the Eastroad Sect to you, Daolord. Maintaining control over its formations will be critical to this fight," Ning said.

"Don't worry about that at all," Daolord Thunderheat said.

Ning turned his head to glance at Naia, Pillsaint, and Su Youji, then smiled. "There's no need for the three of you to participate in this fight.

Would you like to enter my estate-world, or to watch from the outside?"

"I'm watching, of course," Su Youji said hurriedly.

"How could I miss a fight like this?" Pillsaint shook his head.

Daolord Naia didn't say anything. She just stood next to Su Youji and looked at Ning.

Ning chuckled. "Might as well. However, if things get dangerous you need to enter my estate-world. All of you are too weak, after all; once the real fight starts, the Ninedust Sectlord will probably wipe you all out with a single strike."

In the end, they just weren't strong enough. Ning had both the Hegemon's armor as well as a powerful protective divine ability, and he also had his nine novessence arts. This was why he dared to clash against figures like Kongsan and the Ninedust Sectlord. Daolords like Naia would be finished in one blow. The difference in power was simply too great."

"All of us will listen to your orders, Master," Su Youji promised right away.

"Then I'm going to go now." Ning nodded as he flew away.

Daolord Thunderheat, Su Youji, and the disciples of the Eastroad Sect all watched as Ning left, their hearts filled with nervousness.

"I'm just worried that this Daolord Darknorth will be killed by the Ninedust Sect in an instant. If that happens, we really will be doomed."

"There's nothing else we can do. We have to place our faith in Daolord Darknorth." The Eastroad Sect's disciples really were out of options.

.....

Ning walked out of the Eastroad Sect, then scanned the surrounding area. Upon seeing a distant mountain peak a few hundred kilometers away, he took a single step forwards and moved to stand at the very top of that mountain.

"So this battle has finally come." Ning sat down upon a boulder atop the mountain peak, staring at the distant horizons. A hint of fire could be

seeing flickering in his eyes... a burning desire to do battle.

“I’ve now made breaks through in all five Supreme Daos that comprise my Omega Sword Dao. However, I’ve failed with each attempt I make to merge them together into an even stronger Omega Sword Dao.” Ning frowned. The Void Pathway had actually been quite helpful to him. Prior to coming to the Eastroad Sect, Ning had only made breakthroughs in two of his Supreme Daos: the Blood Drop sword-intent and the Yin-Yang sword-intent.

The breakthrough in the Yin-Yang sword-intent had come in a natural fashion as he hastened towards the Eastroad Sect after his battle against Daolord Kongsan. As for the other three Supreme Daos, he had made those breakthroughs during the ten thousand years he had spent in the Void Pathway. Alas, to use them to form an even higher-level Omega Sword Dao required that brief moment of epiphany, a eureka moment.

“In the end, one simply cannot reach the apex through cultivation alone. Perhaps this fight will give me a chance to gain the insight I need to make a breakthrough in my Omega Sword Dao. Once I master my second-stage Omega Sword Dao, I’ll be able to become a Daolord of the Second Step.” Ning eagerly awaited that moment. He was slightly more powerful than he had been when he had battled Kongsan, but he hadn’t made any truly transformative breakthroughs. He was in desperate need of something to stimulate him into making a breakthrough.

.....

Rumble... the towering gray shrine finally appeared in the horizons as it flew towards the Eastroad Sect.

“There it is.”

“The Ninedust Sect has arrived.”

“They are here.” Many cultivators were hidden off in the distance, having teleported to arrive in advance of the shrine.

The towering gray shrine suddenly came to a halt in midair. The Daolords of the Ninedust Sect and its cultivators all stared off into the

distance, as did the Ninedust Sectlord atop his throne. Their gazes almost instantly turned towards the mountain peak which was almost directly in front of the Eastroad Sect. There was a white-robed youth with a black sheath on his back who was on that mountain peak, and the youth rose to his feet and stared right back at them.

“A Daolord of the Second Step?” The Ninedust Sectlord murmured softly, “A puny little Daolord of the Second Step actually dares to block our advance towards the Eastroad Sect... to block my Ninedust Sect?”

Chapter 7: Attack!

“Sectlord.” Daolord Clevermind looked at the Ninedust Sectlord. “This man is a mere Daolord of the Second Step. He knows that we have come, but he actually dares to stand in front of their gates. He clearly is treating us as an enemy. Hmph. Let us send one of our brothers to wipe him out.”

“Mm.” The Ninedust Sectlord calmly assented. Given his status, how could he possibly hold a mere Daolord of the Second Step in any regard?

“Brother Huzhen.” Daolord Clevermind immediately glanced downwards. “I’ll have to trouble you to get rid of this Daolord of the Second Step! You are our first attacker, and as such you need to be decisive in this victory. Shock and awe them. Make sure they know that submission and surrender is the correct decision, and that defiance leads only to death.”

“Understood,” Daolord Huzhen said respectfully. He was one of the sect’s three Daolords of the Third Step, and was quite a formidable fighter. Whoosh! Daolord Huzhen immediately flew out of the Ninedust Shrine and towards the distant mountain peak with Ji Ning on it.

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“Who is that?”

“That white-robed youth actually dares to stand in front of the Eastroad Sect and block the Ninedust Sect’s path. He’s being a bit too brash, isn’t he?”

“If my senses are correct, he appears to merely be a Daolord of the Second Step.”

The cultivators watching from afar were all staring at Ning curiously. Now that the Ninedust Shrine had descended upon this place, it made no sense for a Daolord of the Second Step to stand in its path. It was like a cricket trying to stand in the path of a carriage.

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“It’ll all be up to Daolord Darknorth.”

“I wonder if Daolord Darknorth really is as powerful as he claims or if he is just bragging. No matter what, I just don’t feel safe.”

“Ugh.”

“Let’s just watch and see.”

The disciples of the Eastroad Sect were all quite nervous, especially when they saw that towering shrine hang in the air right in front of them. Would Daolord Darknorth really be able to stand up to them?

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth...” Daolord Thunderheat watched silently. He was more nervous than anyone else, as it was up to him to defend and run the entire Eastroad Sect. He was the one who had chosen to trust Ning.

Ning stood there at the top of the mountain peak, watching as a Daolord flew towards him with robes fluttering in the air. The Daolord called out from afar, “I am Daolord Huzhen of the Ninedust Sect. Listen up, kid. The Ninedust Sect has come to tame and subdue the Eastroad Sect. How dare you stand in our way and cause trouble for us? Are you really tired of living? I’ll give you a chance to live; submit to us right away and join us, and I’ll spare your life. Otherwise... today is the day you die.”

His voice boomed out and echoed within the skies. Clearly, he was doing this to put on a great show. As Daolord Clevermind had instructed, he was going to shock and awe the Eastroad Sect, with the ideal outcome being terrifying them into surrender.

“Haha...” Ning stood there atop the mountain, a smile of amusement on his face as his own voice echoed through the skies as well. “Daolord Huzhen, yes? If you wish to submit to me, I’ll accept you as a retainer. If you attack, you’ll die here and now.”

“What a joke. Go to your death, then!” Daolord Huzhen let out an angry laugh, then pointed from afar. Boom! A series of wooden planks appeared in the skies, culminating in over a thousand planks. Every single plank was covered with complex divine runes; clearly, this was a set of extremely powerful magic treasures. The divine runes began to tremble, causing the thousand-plus wooden planks to instantly form into a stream of azure sword-light that slashed through the heavens towards Ning.

Ning slowly shook his head. Just as the azure streak of sword-light reached his body, he waved his hand. Boom! The azure sword-light was actually blasted apart.

“What?” The distant Daolord Huzhen’s face turned pale.

“Die, then.” Ning’s gaze turned cold. Instantly, the world around them began to darken as streams of sword-intent appeared out of thin air. The terrifying sword-intent condensed into sword-light that swirled around Daolord Huzhen, and then... swish! The sword-light ground him apart like countless millstones.

“N-no...” Daolord Huzhen had a look of horror on his face. He wanted to use his magic treasures to defend, but... splat. The thousands of streaks of sword-light swirled around him and ground away at his body, splintering his divine body and distintegrating his truesoul. He died on the spot.

Ning took a single step forwards, moving through the skies to stand next to the place where Daolord Huzhen had died. With a wave of his hand, he took the treasures which Daolord Huzhen had left behind. A powerful wind was blowing through the skies, stirring his robes. Ning wanted to make use of this battle to find a way to further improve his Omega Sword Dao. How could he possibly be wary of combat?

The white-robed Ning raised his head to stare at the distant, towering gray shrine. He said in a cold voice, “Ninedust Sect, if you leave right now you’ll be able to keep your lives. Otherwise... I’ll kill as many as dare trespass on the grounds of the Eastroad Sect.”

“Kill as many as dare trespass.”

“Kill as many as dare trespass.”

His voice was filled with Immortal energy and echoed throughout the skies, reverberating throughout the world. The distant cultivators watching this from afar were all stunned by this. The disciples of the Eastroad Sect and Daolord Thunderheat were speechless, and the major powers and cultivators of the Ninedust Sect were the most shocked of all.

“What? He was able to slay a Daolord of the Third Step with nothing

more than manifested sword-intent?”

“He didn’t even use those swords in the black sheath on his back. He didn’t even enter close combat, nor did he use any magic treasures. His sword-intent alone was enough to slay a Daolord of the Third Step?”

“B-but...”

“This is terrifying.”

“This is no ordinary Daolord of the Second Step. He’s one of the most freakishly powerful Daolords of the Second Step in existence.”

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Everyone present was stunned. The Eastroad Sect now understood that Daolord Darknorth truly did have a terrifying level of power! As for the Ninedust Sect, it now understood that the white-robed youth before them would be the greatest impediment to their designs over the Eastroad Sect.

“Brother Huzhen!”

“Huzhen!”

“Master!”

A number of anguished cries rang out from within the Ninedust Shrine, with the cultivators in question filled with rage. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, he let out a soft laugh from atop his throne. “Interesting. It seems this Daolord of the Second Step does have a few skills to rely on. Still... in the end, he is just a Daolord of the Second Step. Clevermind, Graceful, Bruteflame, do not be overconfident. We need to smash through the Eastroad Sect like rotting wood. All three of you should simultaneously attack and crush this Daolord of the Second Step.”

“All three of us, attack together?” Daolord Graceful couldn’t help but want to confirm this. They were different from Daolord Huzhen, as the power gap between Daolords of the Third Step and Daolords of the Fourth Step was quite significant. To reach the fourth step meant that you were a major power who had virtually reached the absolute apex of a certain personal Dao. Daolord Clevermind in particular possessed incredible

power, and was capable of killing ordinary Daolords of the Fourth Step.

“It is enough for Bruteflame and myself to attack,” Daolord Graceful said. “If we work together, we can deal with even the most freakishly powerful Daolords of the Second Step.”

“No.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “Let’s not waste any more time on a Daolord of the Second Step. All three of you should attack simultaneously and let the Eastroad Sect understand that resistance is futile.”

“Understood.” Daolord Clevermind, Daolord Graceful, and Daolord Bruteflame all assented respectfully. If the sectlord had made up his mind, then they wouldn’t dare to argue any further.

“Let’s go,” Daolord Clevermind barked, then transformed into a streak of light that flew out.

“Let’s go.” Daolords Graceful and Bruteflame followed behind him.

“All three vice sectlords are attacking. Even if this Daolord of the Second Step is one of the most legendary of geniuses, he’s definitely going to die.”

“The three vice sectlords are probably enough to crush the entire Eastroad Sect by themselves.”

The many cultivators within the Ninedust Shrine were filled with complete confidence.

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As the three flew out from the shrine, the skies instantly darkened around them. Rumble... a terrifying, endless streak of saber-light filled the skies, and at its edges was an aura of gray mist as well as boundless flames.

Saber-light, mist, and flames. They filled the skies for countless kilometers around in a manifestation of the might of the Dao of the three. The three vice sectlords had been famous in the surrounding territories for countless years now, and the manifestation of their Dao alone was enough to stun everyone present.

“The Ninedust Sect is actually sending out all three of its vice sectlords at the same time? This is a bit much, isn’t it? For a Daolord of the Fourth Step to fight against a Daolord of the Second Step is already bullying. Three against one?”

“This isn’t bullying. This is a war between the Ninedust Sect and the Eastroad Sect. This Daolord has only himself to blame for daring to get involved.”

“The Eastroad Sect wants to crush this Daolord in an instant.”

Many of the distant spectators, especially the ones belonging to the organizations of the surrounding territories, were scouts who had been placed here long ago. They couldn’t help but shake their heads and sigh. They knew just how terrifyingly strong the three vice sectlords of the Ninedust Sect were. Every single one of them was incredibly formidable. All three at once? None of them believed the white-robed kid had a chance.

“Hmph.” Standing there in the air, Ning let out a cold snort. Rumble... endless amounts of sword-light filled the skies like a great flood, blanketing the heavens as they smashed towards the saber-light, the mist, and the flames.

The saber-light, the mist, and the flames were hurtling from one direction, while Ning’s ocean of sword-light came crashing from the other. The two curtains of power quickly collided. The blurry mist and the frenzied flames were instantly suppressed, while the frenzied saber-light clashed repeatedly in the air against Ning’s sword-light, neither able to gain an advantage over the other.

The might of their respective Daos continued clashed against each other. As for the three vice sectlords, they stared in the air towards Ning. By now, they realized that they had encountered a truly tough foe.

Chapter 8: Sharpened

The two sides stared at each other from afar. This clash of Daos alone let the three vice sectlords know that in terms of insights into the Dao, this mere Daolord of the Second Step was already on par with Daolord Clevermind and superior to the other two vice sectlords! This caused their ardor to cool down. However, they remained full of confidence. There would be an enormous difference in amount of divine power and Immortal energy, after all; one was a Daolord of the Second Step, the others were Daolords of the Fourth Step!

“Attack,” Daolord Clevermind shouted mentally to the other two.

“GRWAAAWR!” Daolord Bruteflame raised his head and let out a bellow as his stony body suddenly expanded. He transformed into an enormous stone titan that was ten million kilometers tall, and his two giant stone legs slammed into the ground like the pillars of heaven themselves, causing the earth to tremble. His two arms seemed to contain the power to annihilate the heavens as he sent them smashing towards Ning.

“Interesting.” One of the Northbow swords flew out from Ji Ning’s back, falling into his hands. He transformed into the [Three Heads, Six Arms] form, all six of his arms clenched around the hilt of this sword. His sword suddenly expanded to become massive as well, and his six arms swung it outwards in a furious chop.

Omega Sword Dao –!

Ning had made breakthroughs in all five of his Supreme Daos. Although he hadn’t been able to merge them together into a higher-level Omega Sword Dao, his total combat power had still improved by a bit. He was now on par with Patriarch Clearwind in every respect, be it in using quick sword-arts, fierce sword-arts, or unpredictable sword-arts. In fact, his perfection in every area was such that his sword-arts would be enough to force Patriarch Clearwind to flee.

BOOM! The massive streak of sword-light slammed into those two enormous, heaven-overturning arms which brimmed with flames. An

enormous explosion blasted out, and Ning couldn't help but take two steps back. As for the giant stone titan, Daolord Bruteblade, he stumbled one step back as well.

"Daolord Bruteblade lives up to his reputation as an Aberrant special lifeform. The star maps of the Brightshore Kingdom described him as an Aberrant famous for his strength. However, he's weak in terms of speed and technique," Ning amused.

"What? A Daolord of the Second Step was actually able to fight Bruteblade head on?" Daolord Graceful was astonished.

"Not good." Daolord Clevermind's face paled. He knew very well that even if he struck at full power, he would still be at a disadvantage when fighting Daolord Bruteblade head-on.

"It'll be up to you, Daolord Clevermind," Daolord Graceful sent mentally. An incredibly dense black mist suddenly arose that instantly covered the surrounding area which could not be dispersed by the aura of Ning's Dao. Something seemed to be swimming within that dark mist that almost instantly shot out towards the opponent.

"Oh, a competition in using soft, Yin principles?" Ning's six Northbow swords all shot out of the sheath, and he wielded one in each of his six arms, sending sword-light flowing outwards and easily defending against the technique.

"Die, then." The most powerful of the three, Daolord Clevermind, charged straight towards Ning with six warhammers in his hands.

Ning's face tightened. Although Daolord Clevermind's name implied trickery, his combat style was absolutely savage and dominating, but in a different way from how Daolord Bruteblade merely used brute force. Daolord Clevermind didn't seem to have any obvious flaws at all.

"Excellent. The Ninedust Sect is giving me just what I want. I was hoping to have a chance to tussle a bit against comparable foes and see if I can't perhaps evolve my Omega Sword Dao." Ning revealed a smile. "Who would've thought they'd choose to send their three vice sectlords out to spar?" Three of them at the same time would give even Ning some

pressure.

“Let’s do this!” Ning charged forwards.

“Kill!” Daolord Clevermind shot straight towards Ning.

“Hmph.” The distant Daolord Graceful controlled his magic treasures from afar, sending long-range attacks against Ning. He was a Ki Refiner and so wasn’t all that skilled in close combat. As for Daolord Bruteblade, he sent his giant fists smashing towards Ning time and time again, each strike comparable to Ning’s Omega Heavenbreaker attack. Ning had to be wary of him as well.

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For a time, the scene outside the Eastroad Sect was a scene of complete chaos. Black mist swirled everywhere, and an enormous titan was launching frenzied attacks in every direction. At the center of the action was the battle between the number one vice sectlord of the Ninedust Sect, Daolord Clevermind... and a white-robed youth. Thunder and lightning crackled through the air as the giant warhammers linked together into a cage of lightning around Ning, whose six swords struck out with unfathomable, mysterious power. Sometimes, they were as unfathomable as swimming dragons; at other times, they were as explosive as volcanos. In every aspect, he was as strong as Daolord Clevermind.

However, Daolord Graceful and Daolord Bruteblade continued to launch attacks from the sidelines, causing Ning to be distracted and making it so that he seemed to be consistently at a disadvantage.

“This white-robed Daolord really is powerful. He’s actually able to fight the three vice sectlords of the Ninedust Sect to a standstill!”

“Impressive. For a Daolord of the Second Step to possess such power means that he is definitely one of the most freakishly powerful of Daolords around. I’ve heard of such monsters in the past, but I’ve never seen any of them. I’ve really seen something special today.”

“Hm. It seems it won’t be that easy for the Ninedust Sect to take over the Eastroad Sect.”

The distant spectator cultivators, especially the spies from other organizations, all murmured silently to each other. With this white-robed Daolord present, conquering the Eastroad Sect would be no easy feat.

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“This will be trouble.” The Ninedust Sectlord frowned as he watched from afar. Taking over the Eastroad Sect really wouldn’t be that easy. This kid was clearly just a Daolord of the Second Step, but he was already on par with Daolord Clevermind in power. In the outside world, the Ninedust Sectlord wouldn’t care about him at all, but there was no way this white-robed Daolord would be so foolish as to engage the Ninedust Sectlord in close combat. No Daolord of such power could possibly be as foolish as that! Once the Ninedust Sectlord got involved, the white-robed Daolord would probably retreat into the protective embrace of the Eastroad Sect’s formations.

Once he was being reinforced by the formations personally left behind by Patriarch Eastroad, things would be completely different. The Ninedust Sectlord wasn’t confident in being able to slay that white-robed Daolord inside the Eastroad Sect.

Generally speaking, only when the difference in power between two sects was absolutely enormous would one be able to take over the other. Usually, the protective formations covering each set would be enough to offset any difference in power.

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“Daolord Darknorth truly is powerful.”

“He’s actually able to fight three at once and stop all three of their vice sectlords! With power like this... if he’s reinforced by our formations, he’ll probably be able to stop the Ninedust Sectlord.” The disciples within the Ninedust Sect were all rather excited. Although it looked as though Daolord Darknorth was at a disadvantage in this fight, for him to be able to resist all three at once was a testament to his strength.

Daolord Thunderheat had a look of joy on his face, but he then suddenly frowned. “Wait. I remember Daolord Darknorth saying that he was able to

defeat Daolord Naia in a single blow, thanks to his secret arts. Why haven't I seen him use any secret arts yet?" Ning had mentioned previously that his greatest power lay in his secret arts.

"If he's already this powerful in close combat, how much stronger will he be once he uses those secret arts?" Daolord Thunderheat didn't even dare imagine it.

"Wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! Again!" Ning was battling to his heart's content. He could've used the nine novessence arts to end this long ago, but that would be boring. If all he wanted to do was to turtle up, he could've stayed inside the sect. The reason he came out was because he wanted to fight, to temper himself, to sharpen his skills and enhance his Omega Sword Dao! This battle against the three vice sectlords was doing just that, and Daolord Clevermind in particular was giving him a great deal of pressure. He naturally was gaining a few insights into sword-arts as the battle continued.

"Hahaha! Wonderful. Just wonderful!" Daolord Clevermind was enjoying the fight as well, battling with incomparable valor. He was a practitioner of the Dao of Lightning, and was skilled in high-speed explosive attacks. "Kid, you might be able to maintain your current level of power thanks to whatever divine ability you are using, but I want to see how long you'll be able to hold it!"

"Once more time passes, he won't be able to hold on." Daolord Bruteflame and Daolord Graceful were filled with confidence as well. They all felt certain that this white-roed Daolord had to be relying on some sort of divine ability which allowed him to release an explosive amount of power... but the more monstrously powerful a divine ability was, the faster it depleted one's divine power. Generally speaking, this sort of battle strategy could not be used for a long period of time. They had no idea that in a contest of endurance, Ning was superior to all three of them combined because his azureflower mist energy was only used up at an extremely slow rate... and he had an enormous amount of it.

In the blink of an eye, nearly an hour had gone by without the battle slowing down in the slightest. An hour was a very short period of time for

cultivators, and the watching spectators were all quite excited by the spectacle. However, the three vice sectlords and the Ninedust Sectlor knew the truth of the matter, and they all felt something was off.

“How could he last for this long?”

“Why has his divine power been able to last this long?”

The Ninedust Sectlord and the three vice sectlords all had a bad feeling. But right at this moment...

“I’m still not quite there.” Ning secretly shook his head. “Although I’ve gained many new ideas regarding my sword-arts, to merge my five Supreme Daos of the ‘second step’ level into a new Omega Sword Dao is still not possible. It seems these three vice sectlords simply aren’t giving me enough pressure.”

Ning didn’t want to continue the fight against the three of them any longer, because they had already put all of their techniques on full display. It was no longer of any use to Ning.

“Let it end!” Ning willed it, and nine absolutely terrifying ‘dragons’ of destructive energy began to fly out from his body...

Chapter 9: The Sectlord Attacks

The nine dragons coiled around each other, manifesting into a series of awesome waves through the mysteries of Ji Ning's Omega Sword Dao that came crashing outwards...

"Oh no." Daolord Clevermind had been in close combat with Ning, and his face instantly turned pale. He could sense the terrifying power contained within those nine mighty secret arts. "This white-robed Daolord was actually hiding terrifying secret arts up his sleeve."

BOOM! Daolord Clevermind's six great warhammers suddenly shone with complex runes that flowed across its surface, forming shields across the surfaces of each warhammer. Soon, six bizarre shields of lightning had been formed that then joined together, resulting into a complete and seamless shield-barrier of light.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The nine novessence arts came crashing down upon the shield-barrier of light, but the lightning shield was able to hold.

"Thank goodness I had this treasure. Otherwise, I would've ended up losing my life! I need to flee right away." Daolord Clevermind's face was still pale. He immediately commanded his shields to surround him and quickly soared into the skies, retreating at more than fifty times the speed of light.

These six warhammers were no ordinary treasures. It must be understood that outside the Endless Territories lay the Great Dark. Daolord Clevermind had often enjoyed standing at the borders of the Endless Territories and staring into the Great Dark, because it made him feel calm and at peace, which helped him better understand his own Dao of the Saber. One day, while cultivating at the borders of the Great Dark, he had discovered those six great warhammers just floating there. They had been floating through the Great Dark for countless years, but they remained in perfect condition.

After he had acquired these six warhammers, Daolord Clevermind quickly discovered how incredible and special they were. They were

innately heavy beyond compare, and their attacks were utterly ruinous to their foes. It must be understood that if Patriarch Clearwind once more fought Ning in a head-on clash, he would now be forced to flee within a short period of time. Daolord Clevermind was merely on par with Patriarch Clearwind, but he was able to fight Ning to a standstill primarily because of how extraordinary these six warhammers were.

When defending, he could use them to form an absolute defense of lightning. When fleeing, they would envelop him and allow him to move at a hundred times the speed of light. The only reason why he was moving slower than that was because of the nine novessence arts attacking him.

As soon as he had acquired the six warhammers, Daolord Clevermind understood that they had to have been items of great might left behind by an ancient power, perhaps even a top-tier Eternal Emperor. After acquiring them, his status within the sect became even firmer than it was before.

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“Not good.” Daolord Graceful was a Ki Refiner and as such battled from afar. When he saw those nine dragon-like streams of novessence energy appear, he instantly understood that he was in mortal danger. Even his magic treasures were blasted away by those nine streams of energy, causing him to lose control over them. “If those things so much as touch me, I’m finished. I need to get the hell out of here.”

Daolord Graceful gritted his teeth, then produced a black disc-shaped Dao-seal which was covered with layers of strange rippling runes, then crushed it. Swoosh. Instantly several streaks of black light circled around him... and just like that, he was teleported away and disappeared.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” The towering Aberrant stone giant, ‘Daolord Bruteflame’, let out agonized screams as his stony body was rent asunder by those nine novessence arts. He was completely incapable of withstanding the assault, and his towering, ten million kilometer long body quickly crumbled to become nothing more than a boulder-sized

head. A look of despair was in his eyes.

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Ning had almost instantly activated his nine novessence arts. Everything had happened far too quickly, giving the distant Ninedust Sectlord no time to intervene as well.

“Eh?” Ning frowned. “Two actually managed to escape? The battle we were just in caused distortions in spacetime, making it impossible to teleport out through normal means. Daolord Graceful, however, seemed to flee using some sort of Dao-seal. I didn’t expect that someone as unremarkable and low-key as him would actually be hiding such marvelous treasures as well.”

Ning had predicted that Daolord Clevermind might be able to escape from his killing blow; given how strong the man was, he most assuredly had some life-saving trump cards up his sleeves. But who would’ve thought that Daolord Graceful would also be able to produce such a rare item?

“Daolord Clevermind’s six great warhammers are unquestionably weapons of extraordinary power. They were actually able to block my nine novessence arts head-on! For Kongsan or the Ninedust Sectlord to do that would be one thing, but who would’ve thought Clevermind would also be capable of it? Those six warhammers truly are marvelous; they even allow him to flee at incredible speeds!” Ning couldn’t help but sigh at how extraordinary those things were.

Although many thoughts flickered through Ning’s mind, his hands moved at lightning speed as he hurled out a black gourd that flew straight towards the stony form of Daolord Bruteblade.

“Daolord Bruteblade, either submit to me or die to me.” Ning stared at Daolord Bruteblade’s stony head, the only part of him which was left undamaged. “Choose immediately.

“S-submit!” Daolord Bruteblade was utterly terrified, and he made his choice without hesitate. Swoosh! The head flew straight towards the black gourd and the field of novessence energy around it, shrinking as it quickly

disappeared into the gourd.

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“Damn.” The Ninedust Sectlord’s face had tightened as soon as he saw Ning use those nine novessence arts. Battles between Daolords happened at incredible speeds, making it impossible for him to save Daolord Bruteflame.

Boom!

The Ninedust Sectlord almost instantly charge out of his shrine, a dark-red longstaff appearing in his hands and almost immediately expanding over a hundred million kilometers. He swung out with the longstaff, sending it smashing towards the incredibly distant Ning as though it was one of the pillars of the heavens.

BOOM! When the staff swept out, the world itself seemed to turn dark. When it clashed against the nine novessence arts, the energy flows of the novessence arts were thrown into a state of chaos. However, the nine novessence arts were formless to begin with, and so they quickly returned back to normal as the staff continued to smash towards Ning at high speeds.

“What a pity.” Faced with a terrifying staff-strike, Ning merely glanced sideways at the fleeing Daolord Clevermind, who was escaping thanks to his protective cage of lightning. Daolord Clevermind was fleeing at more than fifty times the speed of light right now, but if Ning used his own flying vessel he’d be able to catch the man.

The problem was, given how the thunderhammer cage was able to defend against even the nine novessence arts, it would undoubtedly be hard for Ning to breach it with any of his other attacks. His only choice was to rely on his superior azureflower mist energy to slowly fight a war of attrition which he might win, with time... but there was no time for that. The Ninedust Sectlord had come.

“Come, then. I want to see just how strong figures like the Ninedust Sectlord or Daolord Kongsan are in close combat.” Ning could sense that he had improved somewhat since the battle at Skywood City, while his

strengthened nine novessence arts would be able to hamper and weaken his foe's staff-arts. It seemed likely that Ning would be able to at least give the man a good fight.

"Break for me!" Ning gripped a single sword with all six arms, then unleashed the Heavenbreaker stance of his Omega Sword Dao.

BOOM! The obliterating staff collided head-on with the heaven-breaking sword.

Ning could sense a surge of incomparably vast and powerful energy smash into him from the collision. Even after the Hegemon armor ablated most of the power of the blow, he was still sent flying backwards.

"He actually didn't die?" The silver-faced, silver-robed Ninedust Sectlord was rather surprised. "Hmph. Then take another hit from me." He charged straight into the awesome field of novessence energy, and the power of this field caused him to feel even more surprised. He could sense his own speed dropping rapidly, but he was still able to endure the attacks. He couldn't help but narrow his eyes. "This is a tough foe. His secret arts are even stronger than mine."

The battle was simply happening too fast. Daolord Bruteflame was captured alive, Daolord Graceful disappeared without a trace, while Daolord Clevermind had fled in terror. A heartbeat later, the Ninedust Sectlord had attacked.

"What technique was that?!"

"The three vice sectlords were defeated in one strike. Even the Ninedust Sectlord has entered the fray."

"It has to be some sort of secret art."

"Or perhaps the unleashed of some ancient power's Dao-seal."

The distant spectators as well as the Ninedust cultivators all watched both nervously and intently. This was all happening too fast, and it might end if they so much as blinked.

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Ning was not surprised by how fearlessly the Ninedust Sectlord charged into the flood of novessence energies. Daolord Kongsan had been able to withstand his nine novessence arts as well, after all. For the Ninedust Sectlord to be able to resist it made sense, as he was on par with ordinary Eternal Emperors in power. “Hmph. Once my Omega Sword Dao reaches a higher level, my nine novessence arts will be dramatically strengthened as well. By then it won’t be this easy for you!”

“However... I’m still much weaker than figures like Kongsan and Ninedust in a head-on fight. His staff had lost 30-40% of its power when it went through my novessence arts, I think.” Ning had been smashed so far back that he had been sent flying to the very edge’s of the Eastroad Sect’s formations. Even his body felt slightly numb... and this was after the Hegemon armor had absorbed most of the impact! If he didn’t have the Hegemon armor, he probably would’ve died or suffered heavy wounds.

“Die.” The Ninedust Sectlord charged straight towards Ning, his eyes burning with rage.

“Haha. Let’s continue this fight inside the Eastroad Sect.” Ning let out a grinning chuckle, then retreated backwards and entered the protective embrace of the Eastroad Sect’s formations. In the outside world, he had been blown backwards even with the support of his nine novessence arts. There was simply no way for him to fight a battle there.

“Hmph. How impressive can the formations which Eastroad set up be?” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t hesitate at all. Longstaff in his hands, he smashed a hole through the protective barriers and charged straight inside the Eastroad Sect.

Chapter 10: Breakthrough – Daolord of the Second Step

“I’m inside.” A hint of excitement flickered through the Ninedust Sectlord’s eyes after he charged into the Eastroad Sect. He could sense fate calling straight to him. “I can sense it with increasing clarity now. Hmph. I might’ve been afraid to come here when Patriarch Eastroad was alive, but does this puny Daolord of the Second Step really think he can stop me, even if he is freakishly talented? What a joke.”

“The Emperor’s Numerancy divinations were spot on. My destiny does indeed reside within this territory. All the effort I put into seizing the position of sectlord in the Ninedust Sect was worth it.” The Ninedust Sectlord’s mind was filled with many thoughts, but he showed no mercy at all when he attacked.

“Break for me!” The longstaff in his hands swept out. Boom! Boom! Boom! It was like an endless sea of water was bellowing towards the skies, with his longstaff containing multiple waves of destructive energy which wantonly struck out against everything within the Eastroad Sect. His longstaff caused palaces to crumble, walls to collapse, and courtyards to shatter. His entrance and his attack was so sudden that some of the spectating disciples of the Eastroad Sect weren’t able to flee in time. Eleven of them were killed instantly.

“Hide immediately!” Daolord Thunderheat was shocked; the Ninedust Sectlord’s attack had simply been too fast! “Hide behind me!” As he spoke, he hurriedly took control over the formations of the Eastroad Sect.

With a hissing sound, the many formations inside the Eastroad Sect were all simultaneously activated alongside the most powerful defensive barriers. One tendril of golden flame after another began to appear, then converge upon the Eastroad Sectlord like an endless stream of golden serpents. Each individual serpent seemed unremarkable, but the Ninedust Sectlord’s face tightened when he saw them. “Patriarch Eastroad really was willing to spare no expense in setting up such an enormous

formation.”

Barging into another major power’s base was an extremely risky maneuver. He had long ago desired to enter this place, but so long as Patriarch Eastroad was alive and his avatar stood guard over this place there was no way the Ninedust Sectlord would dare trespass.

“Get over here, right away!” Daolord Thunderheat hurriedly waved his hand, taking his various disciples and placing them into his own estate-world.”

“The three of you should stop watching as well.” Ning moved next to Su Youji, Pillsaint, and Naia, a solemn look on his face. “Daolord Thunderheat and I are not certain as to what powers the Ninedust Sectlord possesses. He might unleash some sort of overwhelmingly powerful killer blow that will annihilate you merely as collateral damage.”

“Alright.” Su Youji and the others didn’t want to leave their lives up to luck, and so they all nodded obediently. Ning waved his hand, causing Su Youji, Pillsaint, and Naia to be instantly drawn into his estate-world.

By now, only three living creatures were left within the Eastroad Sect; all others had been drawn away into estate-worlds. The three were the Ninedust Sectlord, Ji Ning, and Daolord Thunderheat.

“Be careful, Daolord Thunderheat,” Ning sent mentally. Daolord Thunderheat couldn’t hide; he had to stay out here to control the formations.

“Don’t worry. I’ll stay far away from the two of you, and the formations inside the Eastroad Sect will make it impossible for the Ninedust Sectlord to even sense where I am. If I still end up dying accidentally somehow, I’ll have only my poor bad luck to blame.” A frenzied look was in Daolord Thunderheat’s eyes. “Fellow Daoist Darknorth, the rest is up to you.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded.

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“That direction over there.” The Ninedust Sectlord turned to follow the silent whispers of fate, moving deeper into the Eastroad Sect while

continuing to defend against the golden serpents and leaving absolute destruction in his wake.

“Ninedust Sectlord, I might not be a match for you in the outside world... but for you to charge into the Eastroad Sect is far too brash.” Ning once more revealed himself, his nine novessence arts at the ready.

A desire to do battle could be seen in Ning’s eyes. Experts like the Ninedust Sectlord held profound levels of insight into the Dao and gave Ning a completely different type of pressure in battle, making it easier for him to gain insights into his own Dao. However, under normal circumstances a battle against such a figure would be incredibly dangerous; the slightest miscalculation might result in death. The only reason Ning was able to fight him now was because the formations of the Eastroad Sect were helping him out.

Swish! A streak of sword-light flew out towards the Ninedust Sectlord, whose face tightened slightly. “Damn. It’s that irritating Daolord of the Second Step.”

Hisssss! Countless golden serpents swarmed around him, and the nine novessence arts rumbled as they transformed into dragons of energy which furiously hammered down upon him.

A rippling curtain of water appeared around the Ninedust Sectlord’s body, but in the end his defenses were unable to hold. Still, much of the power of the attacks had been weakened. “The power of the formation, combined with this second-step Daolord’s secret arts, means that I’m at best able to unleash at enth of my true power.” The Ninedust Sectlord felt like an ordinary man who was trapped in mud; every single strike and movement was much slower than usual, as was the power of his blows.

Clang! Ning’s sword-light came straight towards him once more. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! His longstaff struck out like a Flood Dragon as it swept forwards, but Ning’s sword-light was formless and traceless, moving without sound and springing towards him from every direction..

“His sword-arts truly are unpredictable.” In the previous battle, the Ninedust Sectlord had overwhelmingly dominated Ning, and so he hadn’t

truly realized how tough to deal with Ning's sword-arts were. Now that his personal power had been dramatically reduced, he came to understand what a tough foe Ning truly was.

"If this continues... fighting in the Eastroad Sect's base is disadvantageous to me." The Ninedust Sectlord let out a furious roar, and his aura instantly expanded dramatically. The longstaff in his hands actually increased in size still further, allowing him to instantly overwhelm Ning and put Ning back on the defensive.

"So the new sectlord of the Ninedust Sect is as powerful as this, eh?" Ning only grew even more excited. "Perfect. The stronger he is, the better it will be for me. I just hope he isn't too much for me to handle." Ning had been itching to find a chance to train his sword-arts, and he needed this sort of terrifying pressure in order for him to gain the insights he needed.

The Ninedust Sect had a former sectlord who had been an extremely vile person. He had been the one to establish the actual sect, and back then Daolord Clevermind and the others had all been his retainers. Later on, the old sectlord had perished and the new one had risen to power. The new sectlord always wore a mask on his face and was a very mysterious figure. Each time he put his power on display, he had shown to the Brightshore Kingdom that he was on the same level of power as the likes of Daolord Kongsan.

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"Fuck. OFF!" The Ninedust Sectlord was putting more and more pressure on Ning, continuing to advance while Ning was forced to retreat. Slowly, however, the look in Ning's eyes began to change. First, a hint of puzzlement appeared. Then, a look of insight.

Why did cultivators put themselves in dangerous situations? Why did they walk the fine line between life and death? It was all because they could only make breakthroughs through epiphanies gained when under immense pressure. If they focused all of their time and effort on training in seclusion, it would be difficult for them to become truly accomplished figures.

The Ninedust Sectlord's staff-arts truly were abstruse and profound. Although Ning trained in the Omega Sword Dao, he was still just a Daolord of the First Step. As a result, the Ninedust Sectlord's 'Dao' completely outstripped Ning's in raw power, giving him an enormous amount of pressure. Under this immense pressure, Ning became to make some breakthroughs thanks to the accumulated experiences he had gained while walking the Void Pathway for nearly a million years.

"So that is my Omega Sword Dao... level two." A hint of a smile was on Ning's lips.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The nine novessence arts had been dominating and awesome to begin with, but they suddenly transformed to become even more abstruse and profound than ever before. They had clearly become much more powerful than just a short while ago, and were now as strong as the restrictive spells protecting the Eastroad Sect. The Ninedust Sectlord blanched when he saw this; moments ago he had been dominating Ning, but now he had to focus all of his energy into resisting the nine novessence arts and those little golden serpents.

The Ninedust Sectlord twirled his longstaff, struggling to defend while dodging nonstop. The shockwaves from this battle were causing the nearby palaces to all fall apart.

"If I can reach the third level with my Omega Sword Dao, my nine novessence arts might be able to reach Daolord Allgod's level in power," Ning mused to himself. Based on his calculations pertaining to the power of his Omega Sword Dao, when he was a Daolord of the Third Step his Omega Sword Dao would be roughly on par with the Daos of the likes of Palace Lord Dawnstar or Daolord Allgod. By then, when he infused his Omega Sword Dao into his nine novessence arts they should be just as powerful as they had been when Daolord Allgod had personally used them to suppress and entrap Emperor Melobo.

As for right now? He wasn't able to suppress Emperor Melobo yet, but he was able to force the Ninedust Sectlord to tread lightly, whereas in the past the latter was able to defend against it without too much difficulty.

“The Ninedust Sectlord, eh? When I killed Kongsan, it was all thanks to the Hegemon Dao-seal, not my own power. If I can slay the Ninedust Sectlord with my own abilities... that would be much more interesting.” Ning immediately retreated as he sent his nine novessence arts forward along with those little golden serpents. At this point, he was able to advance and retreat as he pleased.

Ning quickly retreated tens of thousands of kilometers, then stood at an empty area and watched from afar as the nine novessence arts and the little golden snakes besiege the Ninedust Sectlord.

“Fellow Daoist Darknorth, why have you retreated?” Daolord Thunderheat asked.

“Haha, I’ve gained certain insights and wish to make my breakthrough,” Ning sent mentally. “After I do so, the Ninedust Sectlord will no longer be a problem.” Swoosh. A black flying vessel appeared, and Ning entered it. With his nine novessence arts and his flying vessel guarding him, he was ready to begin his breakthrough.

However, his breakthrough would be a two-step process. He would first make a breakthrough as a Ki Refiner, upgrading his Jindan chaos region, then make a breakthrough with his divine body as well! He was on a battlefield, after all. If he tried to breakthrough simultaneously in both aspects, he wouldn’t even be able to fight back if he ended up in serious trouble. It was best to be careful. To speed up the process, Ning elected to simply use chaos jewels.

When he had killed Daolord Kongsan, he had acquired a good number of treasures. Other treasures and curios aside, Ning had over two hundred million cubes worth of chaos nectar and chaos jewels! The amount of chaos jewels needed to break through to become a Daolord of the Second Step was negligible for Ning.

Rumble...

The Dao-tree within Ning’s Jindan chaos region began to grow.

Chapter 11: The Ninedust Sectlord's Goal

Every branch of the titanic Dao-tree luxuriated with foliage and stretched skywards like a dragon in flight. They had previously been 156,000 meters high, but now they began to climb once more. The tree trunk grew thicker and thicker, soon climbing to the awesome span of 252,000 meters!

252,000 meters was a limit for Daolords of the Second Step. Ordinary Daolords, when they made their cultivation breakthroughs to the second step, would generally only reach at most a height of 210,000 metres. Only after they slowly gained more insights and further perfected their Dao would they reach 252,000 meters.

Ji Ning, however, was different. His Omega Sword Dao truly was the omega; it would always be at the apex of power for any level he was at, and going past that would represent a fundamental, qualitative change! Similarly, there were some Daolords of the Fourth Step who would need to train for countless years before reaching the Verge, but some would be at the Verge of the Daomerge as soon as they reached the fourth step.

“However... it is much harder for me to train in my Omega Sword Dao. It took forever for me to go from being a Daolord of the First Step to being a Daolord of the Second Step,” Ning sighed.

Su Youji had reached the second step long ago. As for Pillsaint, he had buried himself in his study of alchemy and broken through in a very natural manner. This was the case for most Daolords; moving from the first step to the second step was very, very easy. There were no bottlenecks involved for the vast majority of them... but Ning had technically been training for over a million years of accelerated time!

“Still, by comparison breaking through to the second step was fairly simple. Becoming a Daolord of the Third Step will be a hundred times more difficult. As for reaching the fourth step... that'll be even tougher.” Ning understood that the more difficult a Dao was, the harder it would be for him to break through while training in it. Take Numerancy for

example! Even someone who was as incredibly talented in this dao as Daolord Badlands was still just a Daolord of the Third Step! Ning's Omega Sword Dao was far more powerful than Badlands' Dao.

Whoosh. As the Dao-tree grew, the Jindan chaos region began to expand as well. Because Ning was using chaos jewels to make his breakthrough, no commotion was caused and no fluctuations in the surrounding primordial chaos could be observed.

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Ning's attention was completely focused upon making the necessary breakthroughs, and he spared just a bit of energy on maintaining his nine novessence arts and having them attack the Ninedust Sectlord.

"Damn. Why have these secret arts suddenly become so much more powerful?" The Ninedust Sectlord spun the longstaff in his hands, his body constantly flickering as he swept his weapon out in every direction to block the endless sea of small golden snakes and the nine mighty novessence arts.

"That's the direction, over there. I can sense the whispers of fate growing louder and louder." On the surface, it looked like the Ninedust Sectlord was able to fight back against the nine novessence arts and the little golden snakes, but in reality he was 'accidentally' moving further and further in a certain direction while dodging. He'd sometimes go left, sometimes go right, sometimes advance, sometimes retreat... but on the whole, he was moving closer and closer to the place which was calling out to him.

"That's where my destiny lies. I've worked so hard to follow the Emperor's guidance. I've taken over the Ninedust Sect and used it to explore all of the surrounding territories... and now, I've finally verified that my destiny lies within the Eastroad Sect. I'm going to grasp it, no matter what." While it looked like the Ninedust Sectlord was being pressed quite hard, in reality everything was still under his control.

Although the formations of the Eastroad Sect and the nine novessence arts were all extremely powerful, they shared a common flaw; both were

domain-type attacks. There were simply too many of those little golden serpents, and they had primarily been designed to entrap and encumber a foe, allowing Daolord Eastroad himself to deliver the actual fatal blow.

As for Ning's nine novessence arts, they were also meant to be used as a domain-type attack. Daolord Allgod had devised this technique to entrap Emperor Melobo! They were meant to serve as a domain for trapping and surrounding an enemy. They would be able to easily smash through weaker Daolords, but only have a restrictive effect on a truly powerful one.

Whoosh. Whoosh. The Ninedust Sectlord continued to silently advance at a glacial pace, afraid of attracting the attention of Daolord Thunderheat or Ji Ning.

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"Success." Ning revealed a look of delight within his black flying vessel. He had finally made his breakthrough. His aura was now markedly stronger than before, and his divine power and Immortal energy had both reached a fundamentally higher level than they had before. Ning quickly began to enhance the six Northbow swords on his back, guiding them in improving their quintessence cores of Sword Dao. This was what was good about Lifeblood weapons; you could continuously perfect and upgrade their quintessence cores, allowing them to grow alongside you.

Still... the requirements for the creation of a Lifeblood weapon were quite stringent. None of the treasures left behind by Daolord Kongsan were suitable for conversion into a Lifeblood weapon.

"Next, time for me to upgrade my azureflower mist energy." Ning's combat prowess was primarily thanks to the azureflower mist energy. He rapidly poured his divine power and his Immortal energy into the azureflower region, replenishing both with his chaos jewels as necessary. However, his azureflower region was now far larger than before, and so more time was needed to 'fill it up' with azureflower mist energy than had been needed for Ning to upgrade his divine body and his Jindan chaos region.

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“I can sense that it is within a hundred kilometers of me.” A hint of delight flashed through the Ninedust Sectlord’s eyes. “No need to delay any further. Let’s do this!”

The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly struck out with the longstaff in his hands, sweeping aside the domain attacks as though he was parting the waters with them, then charged at full speed towards a certain direction. To someone like him, a hundred meters was nothing.

BOOM! He had reached a courtyard which was protected by a restrictive barrier. The Ninedust Sectlord’s aura once more burst forth; clearly, he was going all-out now. The staff in his hands struck out, piercing straight through the formation and into the courtyard. It struck against a decorative ‘mountain’ in the courtyard which had the carving of a stone door atop it.

“There it is! So it was a treasure of the ancestors.” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t hesitate at all; by now, the call from the statue was so strong that it made his heart tremble. He immediately charged over, pressing his hand against the stone door. Whoosh! The stone door immediately swung open, revealing the passageway within it.

Swoosh. The Ninedust Sectlord immediately dove into the passageway.

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“Not good.” Daolord Thunderheat was far off in the distance, controlling the formations which protected the base. His face turned grim as soon the Ninedust Sectlord suddenly charged towards the courtyard which held the Void Pathway hidden within it. When the Ninedust Sectlord broke through the formation and charged into the Void Pathway without hesitating, Daolord Thunderheat’s face turned bone-white.

“Fellow Daoist Darknoth!” Unable to stop the Ninedust Sectlord, Daolord Thunderheat had no choice but to call out to Ning.

“On it.” Ning had no time to accumulate any more azureflower mist energy. He only had three drops of it inside his body, but he could sense that something was wrong. The decorative ‘mountain’ hiding the Void Pathway truly was an ordinary object with no aura at all, but the Ninedust

Sectlord had actually charged straight towards it as though he knew the secrets which lay hidden inside it... then entered the Void Pathway.

Even though Ning had his nine novessence arts, he had been unable to stop the man. "I'll go deal with him." Ning immediately charged forwards, arriving in front of the artificial mountain with a whoosh. He then dove into the Void Pathway. Although it had taken him quite some effort to build up those three drops of azureflower mist energy, they were used up fairly slowly during battle and so three drops probably would be enough. Ning had been planning to build up more, but who would've thought that the Ninedust Sectlord would suddenly dive into the Void Pathway? Even in the Eastroad Sect, the secrets of the Void Pathway were only known to Daolord-level experts.

Although Ning was in hot pursuit of the Ninedust Sectlord, he continued to build up more of that azureflower mist energy, hoping to store as much as he could.

Within the Void Pathway.

As soon as the Ninedust Sectlord entered this place, he immediately saw that pathway as well as the thirty thousand soldiers who stood in two lines on each side of it. Their ancient armors, their solemn auras, and that carving of a throne off in the distance... it all caused the Ninedust Sectlord to quiver in excitement.

"That's one of the treasures of the ancestors! Of the ancestors! I never thought that I, Redwater, would actually have a chance to come to a place set up by the ancestors. All those years of hard work were worth it, completely worth it! Haha..." The Ninedust Sectlord put away his mask, revealing a cold, grim-looking male face. This face was currently covered with excitement as he carefully reached out with his senses to scan this place's aura.

"What secrets does this ancestral site hold within it?"

The Ninedust Sectlord's gaze swiftly turned to that distant golden throne, because it was the throne which was issuing the strongest karmic call to him. "I'll head there first to take a look." Longstaff in hand, the

Ninedust Sectlord charged straight towards the golden throne.

BOOM! As soon as he stepped onto the golden pathway, an enormous globe of light suddenly appeared in the void above it. The golden globe of light shot out two streaks of light into two of the nearby armored soldiers, causing them to immediately charge towards the Ninedust Sectlord.

“Break!” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t even pause as he struck out with his longstaff, sending both of the soldiers flying far away.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! The golden globe of light shot down more and more rays of golden light, causing a continuous stream of soldiers to charge towards the Ninedust Sectlord. However, the sectlord continued to advance at high speed, smashing through all of his opposition.

Swoosh. Right at this moment, another figure appeared within the Void Pathway as well. It was a white-robed youth who bore black swords on his back.

“Ninedust Sectlord!” Ning let out a furious roar, causing all nine of his novessence arts to instantly surge outwards and attempt to constrict the Ninedust Sectlord. They shot out like Flood Dragons, moving with incredible speed and power as they almost instantly caught up to the sectlord, then coiled around him.

“You wish to stop me? I’m at the very end of a long journey. No one will stop me!” The Ninedust Sectlord’s hair flew in the air as azure light flashed within his eyes. It seemed as though he had used some sort of secret art, as he was now even stronger than he had been when battling Ning earlier. Layers of water curtains appeared around him as well, weakening the effects of the nine novessence arts and allowing him to endure all the blows aimed at him as he continued his headlong charge.

“He’s gone berserk.” Ning understood this right away, and so he flew forwards at high speed as well. As for the golden globe of light, it shot out more rays of golden light, causing more and more soldiers to appear in front of Ning and block his path as well.

Chapter 12: Ancestor! Ancestor!

“Break!” Ji Ning immediately activated his [Thee Heads, Six Arms]. Six Northbow swords in hands, he swept through the armored soldiers just as quickly as the Ninedust Sectlord had. The soldiers were completely incapable of stopping him at all.

The Ninedust Sectlord and Ning advanced in succession at high speed through the pathway. By comparison, Ning was actually a bit faster as the Ninedust Sectlord was being slowed down by the nine novessence arts. As Ning chased after the sectlord, he suddenly sent a mental shout, “Sectlord, I imagine the real reason you came to the Eastroad Sect was to enter this pathway!”

“Hmph.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a cold snort from up ahead as he continued to defeat the soldiers in his path.

“I’ve been puzzled, all this time, as to why you are doing this. If you just wanted to take over the Eastroad Territory, there was no need for you to attack the Eastroad Sect itself. It takes up almost no space, after all.” Ning sent mentally, “And there’s no way anyone can notice anything unusual about this pathway from outside... but you breached the formation protecting the area around it, then headed straight for you. You certainly know some of the secrets behind it!”

The Ninedust Sectlord completely ignored Ning, but Ning was starting to understand more and more. Ning himself had only discovered this pathway after Daolord Thunderheat had guided him to it; when he had first seen the decorative ‘mountain’, he hadn’t noticed anything special about it at all. Both Daolord Thunderheat and Ning were extremely puzzled by how the Ninedust Sectlord had flown straight towards the mountain, as though he already knew everything about it.

“You won’t be able to stop me.” The Ninedust Sectlord finally spoke, his voice icy cold.

He had been scheming this ever since Daolord Eastroad had perished. He had released word of Daolord Eastroad’s death, then ambushed and

slain Daolord Overgold! He had even sent the Ninedust Shrine to stand guard outside the Eastroad Everworld, and had been keeping a quiet watch on it like a hungry wolf staring at its prey. His goal had been to cause terror and panic, hoping to force the Eastroad Sect to voluntarily flee.

If the Eastroad Sect really had fled, things would be simple. Upon fleeing, the formations within the sect would have to be withdrawn... and he would be able to follow that silent call of fate as it moved away. He would immediately attack and wipe out the fleeing Eastroad Sect! But of course, if that call of fate remained immobile, he would've spared the Eastroad Sect and instead headed straight to the source of the call.

In the end, his true goal was the destiny which awaited him! The reason why he hadn't been willing to fight head-on was because he was afraid that Patriarch Eastroad might've left behind some sort of deadly spell or technique for his heirs. In truth, his fears were well-founded; Daolord Thunderheat did indeed have a treasure capable of unleashing a deadly attack which was more powerful than the Dao-seals bestowed by Skyaxe and Soleman. The reason why Patriarch Eastroad had dared to go off adventuring was because he had left behind an incredibly powerful protective treasure in Thunderheat's hands to protect his home. However, this was a single-use item; since Ning had offered to help out, Daolord Thunderheat naturally forebore from using it.

"I was very careful this entire time; I wanted to make sure that I didn't drive the Eastroad Sect into a state of true desperation. Although I'm fairly certain I would be able to survive even their most frenzied attacks, I still probably would've been forced to pay a heavy price." The Ninedust Sectlord felt quite smug. "Now, I've reached this ancestral site without suffering any injuries at all."

"Wait, what?!" The Ninedust Sectlord's face suddenly turned pale. He glanced backwards, only to see Ji Ning drawing closer and closer to him. "How could he be moving even faster than me?!" The Ninedust Sectlord was shocked.

This pathway had a total of thirty thousand soldiers, while the Ninedust Sectlord had already charged past twenty-six thousand of them. By now,

every single soldier was vastly stronger than Patriarch Clearwind in his normal state. While the Ninedust Sectlord was still able to advance fairly quickly, he felt certain that the white-robed Daolord's speed would begin to decline as the more powerful soldiers began to appear.

"This white-robed Daolord is much weaker than me. How is it that he's moving even faster?" The Ninedust Sectlord couldn't believe this.

"Hmph." Ning continued to advance at high speed. Soon, he passed the twenty-six thousand soldier mark as well. He had spent more than ten thousand years in the Void Pathway, but he had never defeated this many warriors before.

"Ninedust Sectlord, was all this for the sake of that golden throne?" Ning sent mentally. He wanted to learn some of the secrets regarding the Void Pathway from watching the Ninedust Sectlord, as Ning himself hadn't been able to discern much about it despite having spent so many years here.

The Ninedust Sectlord, however, seemed to ignore Ning's question as he continued to battle, a cold smile on his face. "It seems you've made a breakthrough? No wonder your secret arts have improved so substantially."

"It was all thanks to you. Our last battle allowed me to finally understand what was missing, and I've taken yet another step." Ning continued to smash through all opposition with overwhelming fierceness in his three-headed, six-armed form.

"He really did make a breakthrough." The Ninedust Sectlord couldn't help but secretly feel regret. "He was already on par with Clevermind when he was a Daolord of the Second Step. That means that he should now be on par with me! And those damnable secret arts of his are causing me trouble at every turn."

The Ninedust Sectlord clenched his teeth, continuing his headlong charge. His longstaff swept out with draconic might, causing a series of booms as it smashed and blasted its way through the various enemy soldiers. Unfortunately, Ning continued to move faster than him and was

still closing the distance.

Twenty-eight thousand soldiers.

Twenty-nine thousand soldiers.

Both sides were now extremely close to each other.

“Not good. If this continues, he’s going to catch up to me. I have no choice but to use that forbidden art yet again. Ugh!” The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly let out a deep growl. His aura once more skyrocketed as an awesome burst of energy manifested around him. His aura was now stronger than even Daolord Kongsan’s aura had been. Auras were generally linked to divine power and Immortal energy; clearly, the Ninedust Sectlord’s divine body was far stronger than the bodies of most Daolords of the Fourth Step.

The first time he had used this forbidden art had been when he had broken through the barriers protecting the courtyard which held the entrance into the Void Pathway. Now, he did so again, and he grew noticeably more powerful as he strove to pull away from Ning.

“What’s this?” Ning was rather surprised by this. “The Ninedust Sectlord really does have quite a few tricks up his sleeves. Still... it won’t be of any use. He’s not escaping me.”

Twenty-nine thousand, five hundred... twenty-nine thousand, six hundred...

The soldiers were growing more and more powerful, and both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were starting to slow down and the distance between the two continued to shrink.

“The last two.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a bellow as he charged against the final two soldiers. The two golden-armored soldiers opened their glowing golden eyes as they stared at the Ninedust Sectlord. BOOM! BOOM! They charged straight towards him as well.

Rumble...

The Ninedust Sectlord started to fight against the two final soldiers. He

was actually unable to defeat them right away. “Why are these soldiers this powerful?!” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t know that even Patriarch Eastroad had been forced to go all-out before just barely eeking out a victory. Now that the Ninedust Sectlord was being hampered by Ning’s nine novessence arts, it would be quite difficult for him to defeat these two final soldiers.

“Ninedust, you won’t be able to escape.” Boom! Boom! Two soldiers behind him were blasted aside as a white-robed figure charged straight for him.

“Damn.” The Ninedust Sectlord’s face was ashen. He had been forced to use his forbidden art and as a result had managed to somehow keep himself ahead of the freakishly strong white-robed Daolord, but the strength of the two final soldiers had given his enemy the chance to catch up once more.

“Fuck off!” The Ninedust Sectlord lashed out with his longstaff, striking out towards the attacking Ning in an almost whip-like blow. Thanks to his usage of that forbidden art, he was still able to unleash roughly 80% of his full power despite the encumbrance of the nine novessence arts.

Whoosh! When the staff intersected with Ning’s sword-light, it was as though it had become trapped within the gravity well of a black hole and saw all of its strength pushed off to one side.

Omega Sword Dao – Soleheart!

“You won’t be able to escape!” Ning charged forwards, an array of countless streams of sword-light slashing towards the Ninedust Sectlord.

Bang! Due to Ning’s assault, the Ninedust Sectlord revealed a flaw in his defenses, resulting in one of the two soldiers landing an attack on him. The Ninedust Sectlord was actually forced to stumble five steps backwards. He was enraged to the point of lunacy, and he charged forwards again with teeth gritted.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord battled against each other while also

fending off the attacks of those two soldiers. Thankfully, the two soldiers treated Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord 'equally', launching attacks against both! This was why the battle had entered a stalemate for now.

"It seems you must have used some sort of forbidden art," Ning sent mentally. "Let's see how long you can hold it."

"If you didn't have your own secret arts, you wouldn't be a match for me." The Ninedust Sectlord was furious. Even after having used his forbidden art, he was still in rather dire straits.

Ning, however, understood that there was a limit to how strong the nine novessence arts would be. He had already mastered them as a Daolord of the First Step, and back then they vastly surpassed Ning's close-combat abilities! Although he could continue to strengthen them as his Omega Sword Dao improved, his close-combat abilities would improve far more rapidly. He was already on par with the Ninedust Sectlord in close combat, which meant that those abilities were already superior to those nine novessence arts.

In the end, all secret arts were a form of external strength! If you focused too much on secret arts and not enough on your Dao, there would be a limit to how much you could improve. Still, it was true that the influence of the nine novessence arts ensured that Ning was in an advantageous position in this battle.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The two soldiers who had been furiously assaulting Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord suddenly retreated at the same instant, voluntarily stepping back. Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were stunned by this.

"They are falling back?" The Ninedust Sectlord instantly realized what was happening. A look of wild delight on his face, he charged straight towards the golden throne at the very end of the pathway.

"What?!" When Ning saw the Ninedust Sectlord furiously charge towards that golden throne, he ignored all else and the same thing.

Boom! Boom! The two figures arrived next to the golden throne at

virtually the same instant.

“Weng...ba...hu...jiu...” Suddenly, an incredibly ancient and distant voice emanated from the golden globe of light. It seemed to come from the beginning of time itself, and it carried an aura of mystery and almighty power. It almost sounded like the mumbling of an ancient and powerful figure, and it caused the entire region to begin to shake. Every single part of the void around the pathway began to glow with countless strange runes, and layers of golden rippling light began to appear around the golden throne as well which swept Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord into their embrace.

“The ancestors! The ancestors!” The Ninedust Sectlord was unspeakably excited when he heard this voice. As for Ning, he was completely puzzled. He continued to keep his six Northbow swords at the ready, prepared for any danger.

Chapter 13: Missing

Every part of this golden region was filled with those strange runes, with the golden throne being at the center of it all.

“What’s going on?” Ji Ning frowned. “Previously, Daolord Thunderheat told me that if you defeat all the soldiers and reach the golden throne, you would gain a legacy... but this doesn’t look like the mere transmission of a legacy. Was Daolord Eastroad lying to Daolord Thunderheat? Or was he lying to me?”

“It seems as though the Ninedust Sectlord knows something. Not only is he not worried, he actually looks excited.” Ning glanced at the nearby Ninedust Sectlord.

The Ninedust Sectlord was indeed excited after having heard that ancient, distant voice ring out from the golden globe of light.

“Ninedust, what is going on exactly?” Ning asked.

“Hmph.” The Ninedust Sectlord glanced sideways at Ning, then smiled coldly. “Do you really think I’ll tell you?”

“If you won’t, then you can forget about achieving whatever goals you have here.” As soon as Ning said these words, he sent a surge of sword-light towards the Ninedust Sectlord, the sword-light seemingly filled with the power to destroy all Daos that stood in its path.

“Stop, stop!” The Ninedust Sectlord called out frantically. The white-robed Daolord in front of him was extremely powerful, on the same level as him; if he wanted to cause trouble, something bad really might happen.

“Speak!” Ning barked. “What secrets does this Void Pathway hold?”

“I don’t know either,” the Ninedust Sectlord said hurriedly.

“Are you screwing around with me?” Ning was about to continue his attack.

“I really don’t know!” The Ninedust Sectlord hurriedly dodged, not daring to fight back for fear that the shockwaves from their battle would cause a

disaster to unfold. "I'm not lying to you. I really don't know!"

Just as Ning was attacking and the Ninedust Sectlord was dodging...

BOOM!

The ringed curtains of golden light emanating from the golden throne suddenly retracted, like the petals of a flower suddenly be drawn back into the pistil. Swish!

A streak of golden light suddenly tore through spacetime. Whoosh! Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord had both been covered by that curtain of golden light, and they instantly disappeared without a trace, leaving only the golden throne behind.

No other living beings remained within the Void Pathway.

Rumble...

More and more power emanated from that golden globe, bathing the entire golden region in a layer of golden light.

.....

Whoosh. A golden ripple of power suddenly spread out from one of the decorative 'mountains' within the Eastroad Sect. Moments later, it completely vanished without a trace.

"What?!" Daolord Thunderheat had been watching carefully from a safe distance. When he saw this, his face instantly turned pale. He appeared within that courtyard in a flash. "Where's the Void Pathway? Where'd it go? Why did it suddenly vanish?! His godsense had been infused into the formation protecting the sect, and so was able to cover and scour every inch of the region. And yet, he was no longer able to find that decorative mountain.

"Daolord Darknorth and the Ninedust Sectlord have both vanished as well?" Daolord Thunderheat was starting to panic. "I always felt certain that the Void Pathway was holding certain mysteries. Those thirty thousand soldiers were unreasonably powerful, especially the final two; those two were on par with Patriarch Eastroad himself. I imagine that

when Daolord Darknorth and the Ninedust Sectlord battled within the Void Pathway, they must have activated some of its secrets.”

“Well... now what should I do? Daolord Darknorth suddenly vanished. If he died, then...” Daolord Thunderheat felt rather guilty, because he did have a trump card which he hadn’t used yet. Still, he couldn’t be blamed for holding it back; the Eastroad Sect would need to conserve all the resources it had if it wanted to survive. It looked as though Daolord Darknorth was strong enough to hold back the Ninedust Sectlord; Thunderheat naturally hadn’t been willing to use up his one and only trump card.

“Daolord Darknorth asked for nothing; he whole-heartedly wished to help my Eastroad Sect. And now, his whereabouts are unknown.” Daolord Thunderheat had a complex look on his face as he murmured softly, “I promise the Eastroad Sect will never forget your benevolence.”

As for the disappearance of the Void Pathway? Daolord Thunderheat felt a bit of regret, but he didn’t care all that much. For it to be able to vanish despite local spacetime being completely distorted thanks to the Eastroad Sect’s formations meant that it was a treasure that was beyond the Eastroad Sect’s ability to control.

If it stayed here, it would only cause more trouble in the future. It was a disaster waiting to happen, not a blessing!

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Outside the Eastroad Sect. The Ninedust Shrine continued to hover there in the empty skies.

Within the Ninedust Shrine. Daolord Graceful had already fled all the way back into the shrine. Both he and Daolord Clevermind were standing in front of its gates, staring towards the distant Eastroad Sect.

“Eh?” Daolord Clevermind’s face suddenly paled. “Not good.”

“What’s wrong?” Daolord Graceful immediately asked.

“I can no longer sense the Sectlord’s presence.” Daolord Clevermind said frantically, “The Sectlord has one of my talismans on him; I can sense him

from several territories away. But now, I can no longer sense his presence at all.”

“What?!” Daolord Graceful’s face paled as well. Daolord Clevermind’s position within the Ninedust Sect was second only to the sectlord’s himself, which was why he was on very good terms with the sectlord. Each had given talismans to the other.

“The Sectlord should still be be alive, but I can no longer sense him.” Daolord Clevermind said frantically, “The Sectlord is probably in a very, very distant place. Alternately, he might be trapped in a dangerous place which prevents any information being transmitted outwards. However, a site capable of blocking off my senses would definitely be an incredibly dangerous place. There shouldn’t be any such place within the Eastroad Territory.”

“It seems as though the Eastroad Sect holds certain mysteries within it,” Daolord Graceful said softly. “That white-robed Daolord was incredibly strong. Now, even our Sectlord is in trouble.”

“Mm.” Daolord Clevermind turned to stare at the Eastroad Sect with great trepidation.

“Let’s keep waiting here for the Sectlord to return,” Daolord Graceful said.

And so, the Ninedust Sect permanently stationed itself outside the Eastroad Sect. They would wait for their sectlord’s return... but even after waiting more than a hundred thousand years, their sectlord still did not return.

.....

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were both rather nervous as the streak of golden light grabbed both of them and sent them hurtling through spacetime.

“Where in the world are we going?”

“How could a spacetime teleportation last for this long?” Ning kept his [Three Heads, Six Arms] divine ability active, and he continued to warily

wield all six Northbow swords in his hands. It was extremely difficult to use spacetime teleportation across such a great distance. Even spacetime transfer arrays were all fairly close to each other, allowing the various formations to interlink and send people from one territory to another. The spacetime tunnels created by the almighty Brightshore Hegemon and the Paragon of Pills covered a much greater distance, but this golden spacetime tunnel? Based on Ning's perception regarding spacetime, they should be hurtling towards an incredibly distant place.

"Ninedust, do you really have no idea where we are being sent to?" Ning glanced at the nearby Ninedust Sectlord.

The Ninedust Sectlord glanced at Ning, then let out a cold snort. "No idea."

Ning didn't doubt this at all, because he could sense how nervous the Ninedust Sectlord was.

The two just stood there calmly, neither daring to move. If they got into a fight and disturbed the flows of spacetime around them, who knew where they would end up? They might disappear into the endless Great Dark, where they could fly for thousands of chaos cycles without seeing a single other living being. That would be horrifying.

Whoosh.

The changing flows of spacetime around them suddenly came to a halt, allowing them to vaguely make out what was hidden outside the field of golden light.

"We've arrived." Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were even more cautious now. The golden light slowly dissipated, allowing them to clearly see an enormous stone passageway in front of them. A number of boulders were levitating within the stone passageway, which was brimming with blazing flames.

"Eh?" Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood there in midair. A curtain of water emerged from the Ninedust Sectlord's body, blocking off the flames. As for Ning, the nine novessence arts appeared and swirled around him, defending him from the fire.

“Such powerful fire. I imagine these flames would roast Daolords of the Third Step to death.” Ning was rather amazed.

“What type of fire is this?” The Ninedust Sectlord was puzzled as well. He had seen many things, but still had no idea what these flames were.

“And those boulders?” Both of them turned their attention towards the levitating boulders. These flames were capable of killing Daolords of the Third Step, but weren’t able to damage these boulders at all. Those boulders were definitely extraordinary items.

“Those things have to be treasures.” Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately charged forwards. Ning stabbed out with his sword, seeking to carve out a large boulder from the crooked, curved ‘walls’ of the stone corridor. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, he swung his longstaff and delivered a fierce blow to the stone walls of the passageway.

Bang! Boom!

Two explosions rang out against the stone walls, which rumbled as invisible ripples spread out across its surface. BOOM! A shockwave burst out and struck Ning, knocking him flying backwards. A second shockwave was applied to the Ninedust Sectlord, whose body seemed to shudder and briefly transform into a flowing stream of water as he flew backwards.

“Such incredible power. The shockwave generated by me stabbing at the sword seemed to be several times stronger than my blow.” Ning rose into the air once more, a nervous feeling in his heart. “And it seems as though all of the stones within this stone passageway are part of one entity.” When he had stabbed out with his sword, he felt as though the entire stone wall had joined together to unleash a surge of counter-force.

“Damn.” The Ninedust Sectlord rose into the air as well. For a moment, his body had transformed into a human-shaped pool of water, but he now returned to his normal appearance as he glanced at the distant Ning. “The kid actually managed to endure that counter-force with such ease? It seems as though he has a protective divine ability that is just as tough as mine.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both had rather blazing looks in their

eyes. Both were amongst the ranks of the most talented of Daolords, on the same level as Kongsan... and yet, they weren't even able to harvest any rocks from this stone wall. This meant the stone here was definitely quite extraordinary... and the more marvelous an item was, the more valuable it was.

Swoosh. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately charged towards the floating boulders and bits of stone, waving their hands and collecting as much as they could.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Although it was quite difficult to collect each of those rocks as they were all incredibly heavy, in the end it was still possible to store them within an estate-world.

"Master! Master! I can no longer sense my clone!" The servant within Ning's estate-world who was responsible for maintaining contact with the Brightshore Kingdom suddenly sent a frantic mental message to Ning.

"Right." Ning, however, was quite calm. He had sensed long ago that this was an extraordinary place; in truth, as soon as the teleportation had begun he almost instantly lost contact with both his Primaltwin and his avatar. The last time something like this had happened, he had gone into the alternate universe!

Chapter 14: An Unkillable Form

Two figures could be seen darting through the blazing flames within that stone corridor, collecting the various stones that were hanging there in the air. A short while later, Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord had completely collected all of the levitating stones as far as they could see. After collecting the final pieces, they turned to stare at each other with vigilance in their eyes.

“Our battle has resulted in both of us being trapped in this unknown region. It can be said that the ties of karma bind us together... but I don’t even know your Daoist title,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“I am Darknorth.” Ning revealed a smile. “Given our current situation, there’s no need to continue hiding things from each other. I trust you know much more about this place than I do, Lord of the Ninedust Sect.”

The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “I really know nothing about this place.”

“Oh?” Ning raised an eyebrow. “Well, it truly is an odd place.” Ning scanned his surroundings as he spoke. “These flames... I can’t even tell what type of flames they are. I can’t recognize the stone here either. Even my godsense and my heartforce are constrained, preventing me from exploring any further.”

“Quite.” The Ninedust Sectlord had a solemn look on his face as well as he scanned the area, a restless feeling in his heart. Suddenly...

Whoosh. A fiery-armored figure suddenly flew out of a turn in the tunnel ahead of them. This humanoid figure’s entire body was brimming with flames, and his hair was a blazing red color as well.

“Eh?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord simultaneously turned to look at the blazing figure.

“The two of you truly are daring, to have infiltrated your way to this place without anyone noticing.” The humanoid figure spoke in a cold, piercing voice. “For me to end up stumbling into you two... it seems my

luck today is quite decent. Prepare to die.” After speaking, the blazing figure transformed into a streak of blazing light that seemed to draw in the flames which filled the entire stone passageway, forming a fiery halo of energy around him.

Looks of puzzlement appeared on the faces of both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

“Halt!” The Ninedust Sectlord barked, “We have no idea who you are.”

“Have you mistaken us for someone else?” Ning asked.

“Your lies won’t save you.” The flaming figure let out a furious shout, manifesting a scimitar in his hand.

“If that’s how you wish to behave, go ahead and die.” An angered look flashed through the Ninedust Sectlord’s icy, sinister face. He swung out his longstaff, seeming to manifest an endless ocean of water which carried the roaring song of the sea with it, then struck out against the blazing figure with a boom.

Although the blazing figure used his scimitar to defend, he was blown backwards and smashed against the stone walls of the passageway.

“He didn’t die?” The Ninedust Sectlord was rather surprised. Although he hadn’t struck out with full force, most Daolords of the Fourth Step would’ve perished from that blow. Who would’ve thought that this flaming humanoid would actually have survived?

“It seems you are fairly strong.” The fiery figure growled, “Good. The stronger you are, the better. After I kill you, it’ll feel even better when I feast on your corpses. Die!”

“Feast on me?” The Ninedust Sectlord said furiously, “Die, you imbecile.” This time, he used his staff to strike out with full force.

BOOM! The longstaff caused cracks in space to appear around it as it struck forwards, the power of the blow causing the entire area around them to shake and tremble. This blow was not just fast and savage, it also seemed to carry the cadence of the waves of the ocean, moving sometimes fast and sometimes slow. The flaming creature sought to defend against

this attack, but its scimitar wasn't even able to touch the longstaff. The head of the longstaff smashed directly against the fiery creature's chest, and it was like the heavens themselves had crashed down upon him. The flaming creature instantly let out a frenzied scream... and with a boom, the creature's body instantly blew apart.

"Imbecile." The Ninedust Sectlord showed no mercy at all, striking a second time with his longstaff with the intention of completely annihilating its shattered body. Whoosh! The longstaff swept out, completely smashing apart the shattered remnants of the creature's body and dispersing it into flames once more.

"Kill me? You want to kill me?! You aren't able to kill me!!!" A furious voice rang out as a large amount of the flames within the stone corridor gathered together and almost instantly reformed into the flaming humanoid. He still wore that armor around him, and his scimitar was completely undamaged as well.

"What?!" Ning had simply been observing with interest, but now his face began to turn pale. "He didn't die? His body was completely shattered, but he still didn't die?"

For normal cultivators, once their bodies were completely destroyed they would lose their lives. Only unique types of cultivation could result in 'unkillable forms', such as the virtually indestructible 'darkness incarnate' form of Daolord Kongsan. Palace Lord Dawnstar was far more powerful than Kongsan; Kongsan was just barely comparable to ordinary Eternal Emperors, while Palace Lord Dawnstar was able to kill them with ease. The difference in power between the two was obvious... and yet, due to having an 'unkillable form', Kongsan could be ground into dust but then transform into darkness incarnate, ensuring that he didn't die! Very few people had techniques like this, and it was this technique which made Kongsan so famous.

"An unkillable form?" The Ninedust Sectlord had a look of shock on his face.

"Not just an unkillable form; he's also able to harvest the flames floating

around in this region.” Ning frowned. “His aura didn’t weaken in the slightest.”

“Ahahaha! The two of you are dead meat.” The flaming creature once more charged towards them, an angry howl escaping his lips.

“Let me give it a try,” Ning barked.

“Alright. You go!” The Ninedust Sectlord wasn’t certain in his own chances to succeed.

Ning wielded just a single sword, raising it up high with all six arms clutching it by the hilt.

“DESTROY!!”

The entire region began to tremble and shake. It was like a volcano was building up its power, preparing for a final explosion. Ning’s sword-light suddenly slashed through the air, chopping down furiously upon the flaming creature’s form.

BOOM! This was Ning’s most savage and most dominating strike. It caused the creature’s entire body to shudder, then completely break apart.

“Nine novessence arts, go!” With but a thought, Ning sent nine dragons of energy flying out of his body. Rumbling, they transformed into a chaotic Yin-Yang Sword Domain and furiously ground away at the scattered bits of the flaming creature’s body. The creature’s body quickly dissipated into flames, but the nine novessence arts completely covered the entire area with their domain, continuously extinguishing the flames. After a very long period of time, the mysterious flames in the area were finally and completely extinguished.

“Dead.” Ning dispelled his nine novessence arts.

“That took forever.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded slightly.

Hiss...

Suddenly, a spark appeared in the air in front of them. The spark quickly grew in size, transforming into a towering conflagration that then once more coalesced into that blazing, flame-covered humanoid figure.

“What?! Even after being completely annihilated, it can rise anew from the void?” The Ninedust Sectlord could hardly believe it. “B-but...”

“That’s not possible. I had already completely extinguished it, leaving behind not even so much as a trace of its aura. How could it be born anew?” Ning couldn’t believe it either. “This ‘unkillable form’ it has is terrifying.”

“You aren’t able to kill me! You aren’t able to kill me!” The flaming creature let out a low growl. “Come out! All of you, come out!”

Rumble...

As the flaming creature roared, a strange ripple of power quickly spread out. Just one second later, two more flaming creatures came flying out from behind the turn of the stone corridor.

“Not good.” The faces of the two cultivators turned grim.

Two creatures. Three creatures. Four creatures... one flaming creature after another began to fly out from behind the turn of the corridor.

“Not just there. There’s more coming from this side as well.” The Ninedust Sectlord turned to look at the other side of the corridor. Flaming, humanoid creatures were flooding in from both ends of the corridor.

“Let’s leave, immediately!” Ning roared.

“Let’s go!” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t dare to hesitate either.

“Kill.”

“Kill them all.”

“Eat them.”

A total of twelve of flaming humanoids had already appeared at the two ends of the corridor, and their numbers were only growing. They began to launch a furious charge towards the two cultivators, who chose one direction and began to fight their way that way.

After Ning had developed the second level of his Omega Sword Dao, his speed had increased from ten times the speed of light to thirty times the

speed of light. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, he was a bit faster than Ning. The two quickly beat aside the attacking creatures as they fled for their lives, not daring to tarry whatsoever.

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Attack! Attack! Attack!

The flaming creatures were completely unkillable; even if you wiped them out, they would be reborn out of thin air. Their ability to draw from the omnipresent flames of this place gave them almost limitless amounts of strength. No one would be able to beat them in a battle of attrition.

“I knew the ancestral lands wouldn’t be so easily traversed. Shit, shit, shit!” The Ninedust Sectlord was starting to worry.

“There’s just too many of them. Why are these flaming creatures everywhere?” Ning was worried as well. The two of them had been fleeing for a full hour by now, and they had thrown off many different packs of the creatures while scurrying through the various stone passageways... and yet, every single stone passageway seemed to contain these creatures, and all of them were filled with the desire to kill the two of them.

There were differences in strength amongst the flaming creatures, with some being very close to Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord in power.

“The two of us need to work together,” the Ninedust Sectlord sent mentally. “We can’t keep such a wary watch on each other; we’ll only have a shot if we truly work together as one. Otherwise, both of us will probably die here.”

“I concur. Let’s swear a lifeblood oath,” Ning immediately agreed.

Chapter 15: Ancient Cultivators

The stone passageways branched out like a spiderweb's web, with some being merely a few hundred kilometers wide and others being tens of thousands of kilometers wide. The widest were as much as a million kilometers wide.

They were in one of the widest stone passageways right now. Flames were blazing everywhere, and there were many of those flaming creatures living in this area. Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were able to sense from afar that these creatures would pose a lethal danger to them. They didn't even dare to move close to them, instead choosing to fly into a more narrower passageway.

Swoosh.

A flying black vessel was advancing at high speed through the air, throwing behind the fiery creatures behind them. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood at the very prow of the ship, and neither of them dared to relax at all as they vigilantly scanned the horizons.

"They're coming." The Ninedust Sectlord gripped his longstaff, readying himself for the assault. As for Ning, he was in his three-headed, six-armed form and wielded all six Northbow swords in his hands. The two stood shoulder-to-shoulder, staring towards the front.

Roughly ten million kilometers up ahead, more than six flaming creatures were waiting for them at the turn of the stone passageway. Their numbers were continuing to grow. Clearly, these flaming creatures had some method of communicating to each other, and they knew that if they didn't gather in sufficient numbers there would be no way for them to stop these two invaders.

"Kill!"

Boom!

Although they were ten million kilometers away, the flying black vessel moved at a hundred times the speed of light and so passed through that

distance in an instant.

“Freeze.” Ning’s nine novessence arts were already activated, and nine enormous dragons of power were surging through the area around him. They transformed into a domain of sword-intent, suppressing and binding the flaming creatures around them. It must be understood that these flaming creatures were extremely tough; the Ninedust Sectlord had been unable to shatter the first one with a half-power blow, and Ning’s nine novessence arts were similarly unable to wipe them out.

Still, the nine novessence arts definitely caused the flaming creatures to slow down substantially.

“Die!” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a low growl as he swept out from left to right with his longstaff, striking with the force of a thunderbolt. Boom! Boom! Boom! One flaming creature after another was blown up.

Slash! Slash! Slash! Silently and soundless, six of the flaming creatures were chopped through in quick succession as the tips of Ning’s Northbow swords were suddenly revealed.

Omega Sword Dao – Shadowless!

“Darknorth, flee immediately! We have to escape this stone passageway as soon as we can,” the Ninedust Sectlord sent mentally. “We can’t afford to waste any more time here. We’ll be in serious trouble if we do!”

“Alright.” Ning agreed with his assessment. After so many battles, they both knew some of the habits these flaming creatures had. They generally kept to the specific passageway they were in, and they had a special way of communicating with each other within the passageway! If they spent too much time in any specific passageway, more and more of the creatures would accumulate until finally, a veritable army of them would be on the attack.

The most disastrous battle they had been in involved more than three hundred of the flaming creatures surrounding and attacking them, three of which were nearly as powerful as the two of them. Ning had been forced to rely on the power of his nine novessence arts and the perfection of his Omega Sword Dao to just barely fend them off. The Ninedust

Sectlord's staff-arts weren't as defensively powerful as Ning's sword-arts, and so he had to rely on his forbidden technique instead.

The two had escaped by the skin of their teeth.

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The two of them grew increasingly crafty as time went on. They'd rely on Ning's Shadowless evasion technique to avoid discovery for as long as possible, and they'd end or escape any battles they found themselves trapped in immediately, not wasting any time. And yet, they would still occasionally run into some trouble. These flaming creatures truly seemed to be immortal; no matter how hard they hit the creatures, they just wouldn't die.

"There's a tunnel over there. Hide inside it." They flew into a new, untouched stone passageway via the flying vessel and Ning's Shadowless evasion technique, then quickly dove into a cave opening on the stone walls.

"We can rest here for a short while." Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both relaxed slightly. They had been lucky enough to find a cave right after they had fled into a new passageway but before any of the flaming creatures had discovered them. This meant they could rest for a time! Still, they could only spend a few hours, as there would be flaming creatures patrolling the entire area.

"It's been fifteen days. Fifteen full days of nonstop running." The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. "These stone passageways are without end. They seem to be limitless! Every single one of them is filled with countless flaming creatures, and every single one of them is completely unkillable. The weakest ones are still comparable to Daolords of the Fourth Step! Considering how many stone passageways we've gone through, the number of flaming creatures we've fought is simply ridiculous. Why are there so many of them? Logically speaking, there should be very few creatures which have the power of Daolords of the Fourth Step."

Ning shook his head. "They probably aren't actual living creatures."

“Right.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “I was about to say the same thing. They seem to be part of the omnipresent flames of this region, as well as the stone walls of the various stone passageways.”

“Right.” Ning nodded as well.

They had once personally witnessed the flaming creatures disappear into the stone walls like water flowing into a desert, leaving behind no trace of its passing. It must be understood that neither Ning nor the Ninedust Sectlord were able to damage the walls at all despite launching repeated full-strength attacks against them.

“Darknorth, do you have any Thousand Origins pills or other similar types of spirit-pills?” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. “If you do, sell them to me. Judging from the way you fight and how stable you are, it doesn’t look like you are relying on some sort of forbidden technique or divine ability that explosively increases your power for brief periods of time.”

Ning chuckled. Thousand Origins pills were used to replenish Immortal energy and divine power. Using extremely powerful divine abilities or forbidden arts in battle consumed divine power a hundred times faster than normal; if the battle went on for too long, one would have to rely on spirit-pills to replenish one’s energy. The rate at which one absorbed energy from chaos jewels was simply too slow, and while chaos nectar was quite fast, using it in this matter was extremely wasteful.

Ning was primarily relying on the azureflower mist energy in battle; at most, he would also use the [Three Heads, Six Arms] divine ability, and so very little of his divine ability was used up. As for the azureflower mist energy, it was also consumed very slowly, allowing him to replenish it with chaos jewels alone. As a result, he didn’t need to rely on using spirit-pills to replenish his energy.

But of course, when the Ninedust Sectlord unleashed his full power he remained a bit stronger than Ning. There was nothing Ning could do about this; the azureflower mist energy simply couldn’t be used to execute divine abilities.

“Are you jealous of my Sword Dao?” Ning smirked.

“Your Sword Dao is indeed formidable; it can be all but described as flawless and perfect. We encountered several dangerous situations earlier, but you were able to perfectly defend against all of them. I, however, was forced to rely on my divine abilities and forbidden arts.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. For once, he was willing to give up a bit of his face. “I imagine you’ve used up very few of your spirit-pills. Sell some to me. I’ll pay double the normal price.”

Ning shook his head.

“Five times the normal price!” The Ninedust Sectlord said hurriedly.

Ning just looked at him.

“Ten times!” The Ninedust Sectlord gritted his teeth. “Darknorth, don’t go too far.”

“Ah, forget it. I’ll sell it to you for ten times the normal price them. I was planning to wait until you were really panicking, then sell them to you at a hundred times the normal price.” Ning let out a teasing smile. To sell a spirit-pill at a hundred times the normal price when the buyer was in mortal danger was quite common.

Ning actually had more than ten thousand Thousand Origins pills and Chaos Spirit pills. He had acquired all of them from the deceased Daolord Kongsan, as Ning himself had never used them before.

The Thousand Origins pills were somewhat cheap; each of them were normally worth around a thousand cubes of chaos nectar. As for Chaos Spirit pills, they were worth ten times as much.

The two completed their trade. The Ninedust Sectlord spent thirty million cubes of chaos nectar to buy some of Ning’s spirit-pills. Finally, he let out a sigh of relief. With these spirit-pills on him, he would be able to use his powerful divine abilities without fear. In truth, he still had a good number of spirit-pills on him, but who knew how long they would be stuck in this place for? These flaming creatures really did seem to be all but endless, and he was forced to use his forbidden arts whenever they ran

into a bit of trouble. Otherwise, they'd be swarmed and overwhelmed by the things.

Ning was different. Although he couldn't use any divine abilities, the unscrutableness of his Omega Sword Dao allowed him to easily escape his foes, and the Soleheart stance of his Omega Sword Dao ensured that the creatures found it nearly impossible to actually reach Ning.

"Oh, right. Ninedust, you haven't told anything me about yourself yet," Ning said. "All I know is that you are the sectlord of the Ninedust Sect, and a new one at that. But what did you do before becoming the Ninedust Sectlord? I've never heard of you before. It's odd that such a powerful Daolord as you suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and you don't exactly seem to be the low-key type."

"You want to know more about me?" The Ninedust Sectlord glanced sideways at Ning, then said smugly, "I'll tell you the truth. I'm actually just a Daolord of the Third Step."

"A Daolord of the Third Step?" Ning was surprised. How could a Daolord of the Third Step be this strong? Didn't that mean that it was all but guaranteed he would be the equal of Daolord Dawnstar once he reached the fourth step?

"But your divine body...?" Ning frowned. The Ninedust Sectlord's divine body had an aura of tremendous power, and it was far stronger than the bodies of most Daolords of the Fourth Step. It was highly unusual for a Daolord of the Third Step to have a divine body with such a powerful aura. "Are you some sort of Aberrant, or...?"

"Hmph. Those Aberrant special lifeforms are nothing. I am an Ancient cultivator, the most perfect type of creature to ever exist," the Ninedust Sectlord said.

Ning was surprised. Although the Ancient cultivators were one of the six major organizations in the Endless Territories, they were incredibly few and rare in number, on par with the Brightshore Imperials of the Brightshore Kingdom. He didn't expect that the Ninedust Sectlord would turn out to be an Ancient cultivator.

“As you’ll find out soon enough, this is one of the ancestral sites left behind by the ancestors of my race.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. “I’m afraid, Darknorth, that you won’t be able to gain anything at all from this place, given that it was left by my ancestors for members of my Ancient race.”

Chapter 16: Everything Has Its Bane

“An ancestral site of the Ancient cultivators?” Ji Ning was slightly startled for a moment, then smiled. “No wonder you insisted on attacking the Eastroad Sect, and were able to discover the Void Pathway right away.”

“Eh?” The Ninedust Sectlord glanced at Ning with surprise. “You don’t seem to be frightened at all. Since this place was left behind by my ancestors, any treasures or legacies here will probably fall into my hands. As for you? You might even die here.”

“What’s the point of being afraid?” Ning said casually. Since they had already come here and were unable to flee, the only choice they had was to face everything head-on.

“Besides. It’s too early to speculate as to which one of us will be the one to die. You were the one getting your rear kicked by those flaming beasts.” Ning looked quite relaxed.

The Ninedust Sectlord really was rather amazed at Ning’s calm aplomb. He hadn’t revealed the truth previously, but now that both sides had sworn a binding oath to enter into an alliance and to not attack each other or plot against each other, the Ninedust Sectlord was finally willing to divulge the secret of this being an ancestral site for him. As he saw it, towards the end Ning would still find out, so long as he survived.

“Right. Ninedust, did you just say that you Ancient cultivators were the most perfect creatures in the universe? But based on what I’ve heard, the top-tier Aberrant lifeforms like the Brightshore Imperials are on par with you Ancient cultivators,” Ning said.

“Hmph.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a snort. “Aberrants? They are nothing more than a random, motley collection of freaks which were born out of the primordial chaos. There’s far too many breeds of them, which is why they are just collectively known as the Aberrants. How could that motley collection of freaks be compared to us Ancient cultivators? Just mentioning us in the same breath is an insult to us! As for the Brightshore Imperials, they are a race of Chaos Godbeasts that have been around just

as long as we have. I suppose they could just barely be considered our peers... but if we really were to compare our two races, they are still significantly inferior to us.”

“Chaos Godbeasts?” Ning was startled. Although he was a member of the Brightshore Kingdom, he knew very little regarding the Brightshore Imperials.

“It seems that you are unaware of many secrets, most likely because you haven’t been a Daolord for long.” The Ninedust Sectlord chuckled. “The Brightshore Imperials consider this information to be a source of humiliation; there’s naturally no way they would’ve told you about this. I, however, will.”

“Humiliation?” Ning was quite curious.

“Long, long ago, there were no such things as ‘cultivators’, and the various Aberrant lifeforms had yet to learn how to cultivate either! Back then, the endless primordial chaos gave birth to two types of perfect lifeforms. The first type was humanoid in shape and was truly flawless. They were born with transcendent talent and tremendous comprehension abilities... and they became known as the Ancients. As for the second type, they were shaped like beasts and so became known as Chaos Godbeasts.”

“The Ancients were the first to discover and invent cultivation techniques! As a result, we became incredibly powerful and ended up unifying the endless primordial chaos and becoming its master... and this is why we are known as the Ancient cultivators.” A look of pride was on the Ninedust Sectlord’s face.

Ning was quite startled. So the Ancient cultivators were actually the first ones to create cultivation techniques?

The Ninedust Sectlord said smugly, “As for those Aberrant lifeforms, we held no interest in them whatsoever. The Chaos Godbeasts, however, made for decent servants. We enslaved them and used them as our mounts, ordering them about as we pleased.”

“What?!” Ning could hardly believe it. The Brightshore Imperials used to be the slaves of the Ancient cultivators?

“Back then, we Ancient cultivators roamed the universe without equal.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a soft sigh. “Every single member of our race is born with incredible intelligence and comprehension abilities, and so we created one new technique after another. Do you know how many Brightshore Imperials have managed to become Eternal Emperors? Just one! The Brightshore Hegemon himself! But many Ancient cultivators have ended up gaining eternity. This is all thanks to our comprehension abilities! Humanoid lifeforms, by nature, are more intelligent than animal lifeforms. If the Chaos Godbeasts hadn’t managed to produce a Hegemon, they would never have reached their current heights.”

“A pity, though. That time ended long ago. Now, it is the era of you normal cultivators.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “You normal cultivators aren’t nearly as perfect as us, and some of you actually started off as ordinary mortals and slowly crawled up the ranks of power. Unfortunately, there are simply far, far too many of you. Even if you only produce one genius every trillion years, you will eventually accumulate a ridiculous number of powerful experts. Faced with such an overwhelming number of normal cultivators, we had no choice but to retreat.”

The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. “Darknorth, we Ancients do accept ordinary cultivators into our ranks as well. So long as you are just an ordinary member of the Dao Alliance and not a member of the Brightshore Kingdom, the Aeonian Kingdom, or the Dark Kingdom, we’d be willing to recruit you. Join us! If you are as talented as I think you are, you’ll be given the best of resources.”

Ning pursed his lips. They recruited ordinary cultivators? It seemed like everyone was doing this. The Brightshore Kingdom, the Aeonians... they were all recruiting as well, with quite a few ordinary World-level cultivators having been taken on by the Aeonians in particular to serve as their lackeys. The World-level cultivators Ning had encountered in the Allgod Estate were mostly ‘ordinary’ cultivators; most of them didn’t have any Aeonian blood in them at all. Who would’ve imagined that the Ancient cultivators were also recruiting?

But it made sense. The Brightshore Imperials, the Aeonians, and the

Ancients all had the same problem – they were too few in number!

“What do you think?” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning eagerly. “Most likely, only the Dao Alliance has as deep a foundation as us Ancients.”

“Forget it. Let me think it over first,” Ning said. He had already joined the Brightshore Kingdom; how could he join their enemies? Still, it was best to keep the fact that he was a member of the Brightshore Kingdom secret, in order to avoid any unnecessary trouble.

“No rush, no rush at all. Here in the ancestral lands, I trust you’ll soon come to realize just how incredible we Ancient cultivators are.” The Ninedust Sectlord smiled. “Later on, I’ll make the introductions for you.” He was a peerless genius who had mastered and perfectly joined together two Supreme Daos; even amongst the Ancient cultivators, he was considered one of the elite chosen of his generation.

Long ago, a major power of the Ancient cultivators had engaged in some divination for him, letting him know where he should go adventuring and where his destiny lay. However... in the end, the future would remain unknown. Numerancy divination could only allow you to see a few scraps and glimpses of the future.

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Time flowed on. Having officially joined forces together, Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord continued to carefully travel through this mysterious region, going from one stone passageway to the next. There really seemed to be no end of them.

The two of them spent another three full months trapped in this place. Thankfully, Ning had sold the Ninedust Sectlord a large number of spirit-pills; otherwise, the latter might not have been able to survive.

Swoosh.

On the final day of the third month.

“Kill them!”

“Kill them and eat them!”

A large group of the flaming creatures were in hot pursuit of a flying black vessel which was fleeing from them at incredible speeds while nine awesome secret arts billowed around it, preventing anyone from drawing near.

Whoosh. The black vessel flew into a different stone passageway.

“Eh?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were both startled. Moments later, a look of delight appeared in their eyes. Up ahead was an extremely large and empty area that was at least a hundred billion kilometers in size. At the very center of this region was a planet that glowed with light and emanated an aura of endless might. There were no flames at all in this entire empty region!

It must be remembered that thus far, every single place the two of them had passed through had been filled with those terrifying, omnipresent flames. This region, however, didn't have a single flame within it!

“Have we reached our destination?” Ning murmured silently.

“This place may well be the place which the ancestors wished us to reach.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at the planet in front of him rather excitedly.

During the past three months, all they had seen were stone passageways and endless flames! They had never encountered such a vast, empty region. A hundred billion kilometers, and a planet in the center of it! The aura of power emanating off of this planet was so great that Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both felt rather breathless. This place could very well be the endpoint.

“Kill!” A group of flaming beasts burst out of the stone passageway, seeking to chase down the two of them. However, they suddenly began to slow down as they looked rather hesitantly at the distant planet in the center. The flames covering the bodies of the various creatures all seemed to die down slightly.

“Hurry up and kill them.”

“Don’t let them escape!”

The flaming creatures once more picked up the pace.

Swoosh! The black vessel didn’t hesitate at all as it flew straight towards the planet. The flaming creatures continued their furious chase, but the closer they moved towards the planet the more they seemed to be suppressed. The flames disappeared from their body, revealing the fiery armor, hair, and body which lay underneath! The closer they moved to the star, the more their aura weakened.

“Everything has its bane.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh with amazement when he saw this. “These flaming creatures were completely unkillable, but as soon as they started to move towards this planet they began to weaken dramatically.”

“That planet doesn’t seem to have any effect on us at all.” The Ninedust Sectlord glanced at the planet warily as they moved closer and closer to it. “But its aura of power is tremendous. It might hold certain dangers within it.

Ning looked at him. “What of it? Do you want us to go back into the stone passageways?”

“I’d have to be mad to do that,” the Ninedust Sectlord snorted. Clearly, after spending roughly three months in the stone passageways, he had more than had his fill of them.

“In the end, we definitely have to go take a look at this place. Let’s just be careful,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“Alright.” Ning stared at the planet as well.

The black vessel flew closer and closer to it, with the flaming creatures still in hot pursuit but growing weaker by the moment. Finally, they all came to a halt and let out angry, resentful growls. They had no choice but to simply watch as the black vessel flew ever-closer to the planet.

Chapter 17: The Prophets Descend

The black vessel finally came to a halt outside the star. Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood on the prow of the vessel, able to see the planet clearly.

“What a beautiful star,” Ning praised. The planet was protected by layers of defenses, almost like the yolk of an egg being protected by a shell.

“But also dangerous,” the Ninedust Sectlord warned solemnly.

“Let’s go.” Ning glanced at the Ninedust Sectlord, who did not respond. Whoosh! The black vessel began a slow advance, soon arriving in front of the first barrier protecting the star.

This was a gaseous barrier that was pitch-black in color and extremely solid. When the black vessel sought to advance through it, the two could both sense the first barrier resisting the vessel mightily. The black vessel had to use all of its power in order to just barely advance through the barrier, crackling all the way. After advancing for roughly a hundred thousand kilometers, they left the region of black mist and appeared in front of a region of deep azure mist.

“I imagine that most Daolords of the Fourth Step wouldn’t be able to make it past this,” Ning said softly. “If my judgment is correct, there’s no way this protective membrane could’ve been naturally created. It has to have been man-made.”

“Agreed. Nine out of ten says it was created by a major power that vastly outstrips us in might.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

Swoosh! The vessel continued to advance, passing through one layer of gas after another. There were nine of these gas layers, and they were colored black, deep azure, azure, light azure... the colors continuously lightened until the final layer, which was composed of completely white mist.

By now, the white mist posed almost negligibly low levels of resistance for the black vessel. Starting from the azure layer, a few special lifeforms

began to appear. They lived within the gas itself, and were like gaseous entities. They could transform into any shape, with some being strong and others being weak. The most powerful were roughly on par with Daolords of the Fourth Step, while the weakest were on par with ordinary World-level cultivators.

Whoosh. After passing through the ninth layer of mist, Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord saw a brand new open world appear in front of them. This was a vast and beautiful world, filled with cities, villages, and many ordinary mortals as well.

“So this place actually holds living creatures.” Ning let out a moved sigh. “The endless primordial chaos truly is filled with endless marvels. Life can survive in even a dangerous place like this.”

“I suspect that the major power who created those nine layers of protective mist did so for the sake of these mortals.” The Ninedust Sectlord carefully sent out his senses, then said in a soft voice, “This region is filled with invisible laws, preventing ordinary cultivators from being able to fly at all. Only Daolords are able to fly here.”

“The skies are sealed?” Ning frowned. “Can it be that this planet holds an Eternal Emperor within it?”

Upon gaining eternity, your very words became edicts of law. You could issue certain edicts that all within a certain region had to follow! However, sufficiently powerful Daolords were capable of completely ignoring these edicts. It must be understood that certain supremely powerful Daolords were capable of suppressing even the might of the prime essences of the Dao, located at the heart of the universe. In comparison, mere edicts issued by Eternal Emperors were nothing.

“Right. This place might have an ancestor of my Ancient race.” The Ninedust Sectlord swept the area with his gaze. “Darknorth, I’m sure you’ve sensed it as well. This vast world gives me an incredibly strong sense of danger. If we aren’t careful, we could easily die here.”

“Yes, I can sense it.” Ning nodded. As soon as he had seen this planet from afar, he had sensed a terrifying danger emanating from it. Now that

they had truly entered it, that sense only grew stronger.

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A total of eight strange-looking four-legged beasts were pulling a giant carriage through the grassy plains directly below Ning. Surrounding the carriage there were three hundred valiant knights, all of whom were advancing at high speeds. The carriage was protected by formations which faintly flickered around it, ensuring it didn't bump or jostle at all.

The carriage itself was thirty meters long and twenty-four meters wide. Within the carriage sat a young man who was casually dressed in sleek silk clothes, as well as two bewitching women who were cuddling against him while feeding him.

The youth casually ran his hands across the two women, toying with them. His eyes, however, had a faraway look in them.

"Your Highness, Dragonwing City is up ahead. Should we pay a visit to the governor?" The voice of a knight rang out from outside the carriage. Although their lord had already informed them as to which experts they would visit on this journey, the young master wasn't the type to just do as he was told. There were two experts who he had declined to meet with thus far.

"The governor of Dragonwing is one of my seniors and has always treated me very well. We certainly must visit him," the youth chuckled.

"Acknowledged," the knight said from outside.

The youth inside the carriage caressed one of the women by his side, a dreamy look in his eyes. He murmured softly, "So this is the path which Father has arranged for me? I can already see what the rest of my life will be like. I really am not happy with it."

Whoosh. Whoosh. Suddenly, two figures appeared out of nowhere. One was a white-robed youth who bore a black sheath on his back, while the second was an icy-faced man. However, neither the two women in the carriage nor the noble youth noticed them at all. The youth remained lost in his thoughts and pensively pondering his own future.

“This kid is one of the highest status figures without a million kilometers of this place. He actually has three Elder Gods and five Ancestral Immortals guarding him, while he himself is also an Elder God. And, judging from the way they address him, he should be a prince of some sort,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “He probably knows more about this world than most. Darknorth, shall you do the honors or shall I?”

“I’ll ask,” Ning said with a smile.

No one in the area was able to overhear their conversation. They were simply beings on completely different levels of existence. Although Ning had merely been an Elder God when he left the Three Realms, he could now wipe out untold multitudes of Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals with but a single breath.

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The two of them remained quite cautious. They didn’t randomly start sending their godsense out to investigate, as this world was simply too dangerous for them. It must be understood that not even those innumerable flaming creatures dared to approach this region. If they were too rash, they’d probably die here. Thus, caution was the best decision. This was a principle which all Daolords followed when they were out adventuring.

Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood at the very precipice of power amongst Daolords; they could be considered second-tier Daolords of the Fourth Step by now, comparable to ordinary Eternal Emperors in might. They naturally had to be cautious. The stronger you were, the more careful you had to be.

In a place deep within the underground of this world. This was a place where ancient formations could be seen everywhere.

Roughly 190 million kilometers below the ground, there was a beautiful underground palace. The palace was extremely quiet, and although a few Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals and even World Gods could be seen walking through it, they were all silent and solemn. None of them dared to speak too loudly, as they felt a natural sense of dread.

Within an ancient, quiet room inside the underground palace. A white-robed old man was seated in the lotus position, his aura comparable to that of a Daolord of the Fourth Step. In front of him was an enormous mirror.

The mirror contained within it images of a black vessel flying through layers of misty barriers before finally descending upon the vast world up above. This scene was playing on a loop over and over within the mirror.

“Elder.” Suddenly, a violet-robed man walked over from afar, emanating the aura of a Daolord of the Second Step. He called out respectfully to the old man, but when he accidentally saw the images being played in the mirror his face turned ashen. He stuttered, “A-a-are those Prophets?”

“Yes.” The white-robed elder let out a sigh. “Prophets! After a million chaos cycles, yet another group of Prophets have descended upon our world.”

“Prophets have descended? Prophets?!” The violet-robed man was shocked and panicked. “B-but... what should we do? Elder, what should we do?”

The white-robed elder waved his hand, causing a black tome to appear before him. The tome opened on its own, and it was filled with the history of this continent.

“Don’t panic.” The white-robed elder said softly, “In the ancient annals of our continent, it is said that Prophets have descended on three separate occasions! The first Prophet taught us cultivation, allowing us to escape our fetters of ignorance and enter the era of Immortal cultivation. This was the First Era of our continent. The second Prophet did even more; he established a foundation for us, setting up the nine sky barriers to protect us and thus ensure that those flamefiends wouldn’t dare to encroach upon our territory. These days, only the most crazed of flamefiends would dare to attack, and they no longer pose much of a threat. As a result, our homeland was able to grow truly powerful. This was the Second Era.”

“But the third Prophet and the Third Era he brought...” The violet-robed man said nervously, “That was the darkest era of our history.”

The white-robed elder nodded. The descent of the third Prophet... that Prophet had simply been too greedy, and he had caused a huge war.

“The third time, we were ultimately forced to unleash the power of the Eighteen Heavens and Hells Mutual Apocalypse Formation. We summoned the enormous power inherent within this land and in the end were able to slay that Prophet... but countless living beings in our world were slain as well, with just the few who hid within the sacred lands surviving.” The violet-robed man was extremely nervous. That battle had been a dire one. The entire world had been completely devastated! It had taken them a million chaos cycles to recover to their current state.

“Whether this is a blessing or a catastrophe, we still have to face it,” the white-robed elder said. “No matter what, the descent of the Prophets means that the Fourth Era has already begun. Inkmind, the task of making initial contact with those two Prophets shall be yours.”

Chapter 18: Young Master Skywind

Within the carriage. Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord watched as the youth continued to toy with his maids.

Whoosh. Suddenly, both of the maids fainted soundlessly.

“Eh?” The youth’s face suddenly paled as he stared sideways. Two figures were standing right next to him, staring back at him. One was a white-robed youth who bore a black sword sheath on his back, while the other was a grim-looking man. The white-robed youth had a peaceful aura, and he most likely wasn’t an evil man, but the faint baleful aura surrounding the grim-looking man made the youth feel a bit nervous.

He was very confident in his own abilities, and knew himself to be virtually invincible below the World level. However, these two powerful strangers somehow managed to enter his carriage without him noticing, and his two maids had silently fainted.

“Seniors.” The youth hurriedly rose to his feet and bowed.

“I have some questions for you, kid,” Ning said.

“Please go ahead, senior,” the youth said immediately.

“Introduce yourself first.” Ning’s voice carried a strange, magical power to it that compelled the youth to speak. My name is Skywind. I’m the ninth young master of Skyfiend City, and the governor of the city is my father. I’ve come on my father’s orders to travel to the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion to become apprenticed to Swordmaster Eastvoid.”

Skywind was shocked as the words came out of his mouth. Why was it that he couldn’t control his own words?

“Is this ‘Swordmaster Eastvoid’ a World-level expert or a Samsara Daolord?” Ning asked. The nearby Ninedust Sectlord listened attentively as well.

Given that the aura of danger emanating from this planet, they felt it necessary that they be low-key in all their actions, which was why they hadn’t acted too brashly. They didn’t know what type of temper the most

supreme figure on this planet had; if they accidentally offended and made an enemy out of that person, they could well die if their judgment of this planet's danger was correct.

They had already suffered more than enough at the hands of the endless flaming creatures in the endless stone passageways.

“Just a World level cultivator, of course.” A look of terror was in young master Skywind's eyes as he heard himself speak uncontrollably. Why was it that he was answering every single question posed? “Samsara Daolords only exist in the legends, and it is incredibly hard to trace or track them down. How could I possibly take one on as my master? Swordmaster Eastvoid is nothing more than an extremely famous expert of the Dao of the Sword. He's virtually invincible against other World-level experts, and even my father is far from being a match for him. My father went to tremendous lengths in order to convince him to accept me as his disciple. However, I have to first reach the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion and personally pass a few tests before being admitted.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged glances. World level? To them, even most Daolords of the Third Step or Fourth Step could be annihilated with a casual wave, much less World-level cultivators. Both were comparable to ordinary Eternal Emperors in power, after all.

“Then do you know where the Samsara Daolords are?” Ning continued to question him. The stronger one was, the more one would know. Most likely, the local Samsara Daolords would know more regarding the secrets of this planet.

“I don't know. How could someone like me possibly be aware of what the Samsara Daolords are doing?” Young master Skywind explained, “Perhaps some of the most elite World-level cultivators would know a few things.”

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Ning continued to ask questions, while young master Skywind continued to respond automatically. The latter was at the verge of tears; no matter what the former asked, he was somehow forced to automatically answer

with the utmost of truth. This feeling instilled terror in him. He was repeatedly reminded as to how powerless he was in the face of this white-robed, sword-carrying youth.

After a long period of time passed.

“What do you think?” Ning glanced at the Ninedust Sectlord.

“This will be a bit troublesome. From the sound of things this planet should indeed have Samsara Daolords, and several of them at that,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “In the Endless Territories, our Daolords will usually establish their own sects. Here, however, the Daolords all seem to be in hiding.”

“Right. Let’s go find someone higher ranked than this ‘Skywind’ kid,” Ning said.

“That’s our only choice.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

Both of them were quite patient. They would rather spend ten extra days quietly investigating this planet than to blunder rashly into a fight. As the saying went, only when you understood both yourself and your enemies would you be the victor in all your battles. This planet was quite possibly an ancestral site left behind by an ancestor of the Ancient cultivators, after all; they couldn’t be too rash here.

“I have more questions for you.” Ning looked at young master Skywind.

“Please go ahead, senior,” young master Skywind said hurriedly. He had been completely unable to overhear the conversation between Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord. He knew the situation he was in and was behaving quite obediently.

“Who in this general area would possibly have information regarding where the Samsara Daolords are?” Ning asked.

“In this general area, the highest-ranked figure would be the governor of Dragonwing City. He governs this entire region, and all of the countless living beings here prostrate themselves before him. He’s on very good terms with my father, and has been alive for an extremely long period of time. He surely knows a thousand times more than what I know; he might

know where the Samsara Daolords hide.” Young master Skywind continued to speak uncontrollably, “I was planning to go pay a visit to him, as he helped out quite a bit and was instrumental in me being able to join the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion.”

Ning chuckled. “Good. Then we’ll accompany you and visit the governor of Dragonwing.”

And so, Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both remained within the carriage. Young master Skywind naturally offered all the fine food and wine he had available. The two maids had awoken by now, and they didn’t dare to say athing; they naturally understood that they had encountered two important personages.

“Glug. Ah, it’s rare for me to have a chance to relax like this.” The Ninedust Sectlord drank some fine wine, then let out a relaxed sigh. “It feels like it has been ages since I had the chance to rest a bit. I wasn’t able to relax at all back in those stone passageways.”

“Yes, a relaxed life is the best life of all.” Ning had also been driven to the point of near-lunacy by the flaming creatures, but he was now feeling quite relaxed as well. Suddenly, Ning’s gaze turned towards the inner walls of the carriage. The walls had some scars carved into them, and Ning was able to see right away that these were sword-arts scars.

The Ninedust Sectlord noticed Ning glancing at the walls, and he followed Ning’s gaze. When he saw the sword-scars on the walls, he let out a laugh. “How could someone be so shameless as to put such crude sword-arts on display?”

The nearby young master Skywind instantly began to blush with embarrassment.

“Everyone knows how amazing my young master’s sword-arts are. Young master Skywind’s sword-arts are famed throughout the lands. It was these sword-arts that resulted in him being allowed to enter the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion,” one of the maids couldn’t help but argue, her face flushed.

Young master Skywind buried his face in his hands. Oh my god, you

stupid woman... why did you have to say anything.

“This little girl is pretty devoted to you.” The Ninedust Sectlord chuckled as he looked at the maid. “She’s clearly terrified, but she still wanted to speak up on your behalf. But I must tell you, I was speaking the truth. Your sword-arts truly are crude and ungainly. Hell, forget about your young master’s sword-arts; even that so-called Swordmaster Eastvoid’s sword-arts are unspeakably crude. In terms of sword-arts, the gentleman right in front of you is a true grandmaster of the Dao of the Sword. No, not me! Stop looking at me. I’m talking about this fellow Daoist right here. Can’t you tell he has a sword scabbard on his back? You should be able to tell right away that he’s a swordsman.”

Ning couldn’t help but let out a surprised snort of laughter.

“That ‘Swordmaster Eastvoid’ or whatever he’s called... everything he knows about the Dao of the Sword could probably fit within my friend’s toenails.” The Ninedust Sectlord was clearly in a wonderful mood and so he spoke in a rather casual manner.

Young master Skywind immediately turned his gaze towards Ning, his eyes scorching with eagerness. He was a sword fanatic who was completely devoted to the sword. This was why he had reached such a high level in sword-arts and had become famous in this region. He hadn’t left those sword-scars in the carriage to show off on purpose; rather, even in this carriage he would often ponder on his sword-arts. When he sometimes had an epiphany, he would carve it into the walls.

“Ninedust, you are bragging a bit much,” Ning said.

“I’m doing no such thing. I’m just telling the truth. That East-whatever, he’s a mere World-level cultivator. How could he even know as much as 0.01% of what you know regarding the sword?” The Ninedust Sectlord said hurriedly, “I’ve never met anyone with stronger sword-arts than you at your level.”

As the Ninedust Sectlord saw it, Ning was a Daolord of the Third Step who had truly earth-shaking sword-arts. Once he broke through to become a Daolord of the Fourth Step, he would probably be on par with

Palace Lord Dawnstar. In truth, however, Ning's sword-arts could be fairly described as without peer in all the Endless Territories, because his Dao was that of the Omega Sword Dao!

"Senior..." Young master Skywind looked rather eagerly at Ning.

"You little rascal." Ning glanced at the carriage walls, then nodded. "I can vaguely see a total of thirty-six sword-stances within those carvings. You are fairly impressive for an Elder God... but there is still area for improvement. You can actually fuse these thirty-six stances into just three stances."

Ning pointed at the carriage walls in a very serious manner, and three more sword-scars instantly appeared on them. All three pulsed with sword-intent, but very ordinary sword-intent. Ning was just providing guidance, after all; he was teaching the kid the basics of fusing sword-arts together.

"In fact, you can also fuse them into one stance." Ning pointed again, causing a fourth streak of sword-intent to appear on the walls. This one was extraordinarily powerful, and it was infused with a hint of Ning's own Omega Sword Dao.

"Right." The nearby Ninedust Sectlord nodded. "Kid, today is the luckiest day in your life. My friend has just created a brand new sword-art based on your original one. We ate your food and drank your wine, but we don't want to owe you anything. If you can fully master just one of those first three stances, you'll be able to reach the World level. As for the final one? If you can master it, you'll be invincible amongst World-level experts."

Young master Skywind stared at the walls of the carriage, completely spellbound.

Chapter 19: Within the Governor's Estate

Young master Skywind stared at those four sword-scars, especially the three simpler ones. Countless insights suddenly began to arise in his mind, and he immediately understood that these three sword-stances alone would allow his sword-arts to improve dramatically. In fact, they would even allow him to reach the World level.

He turned his head to look at Ji Ning, then kowtowed without hesitation.

Ning just looked at him calmly. For him to accept a few kowtows after having bestowed the Dao upon this young man wasn't excessive.

"Your disciple greets you, Master." Young master Skywind said these words while kowtowing.

"Master?" Ning was startled.

"Ah? Ahahaha!" The nearby Ninedust Sectlord started to roar with laughter after a moment of befuddlement. 'Darknorth, he's calling you 'Master'. Are you planning to accept him as your disciple?"

Ning shook his head. "I just gave him a few casual tips. It can't be considered as me having taken him on as my disciple."

"Senior, this grand Dao you have taught me will ensure that I should be able to break through to reach the World level within a year. How can such a grand Dao be transmitted without purpose?" Young master Skywind said hurriedly, "I can understand if you look down on me, senior. You've taught me sword-arts. I might not be a true personal disciple, but I can be considered an honorary disciple, right?"

"You are quite crafty, junior." Ning shook his head.

"Senior, do you agree?" Young master Skywind asked.

"Don't mention it again." Ning shook his head again. Skywind was quite talented in the Dao of the Sword, but Ning was currently trapped in an ancestral site of the Ancients. He had no desire to take on and teach a disciple at all. Even if he did, he would have to carefully consider the person's character first.

“Understood.” Skywind nodded obediently. However, he became even more industrious and humble for the rest of the journey. He knew that a truly great blessing had befallen him!

Good heavens. This person was able to casually condense his thirty-six sword-stances into three stances, then fuse the three into a single stance. Supposedly, if he mastered that final stance he would be invincible even amongst World-level cultivators. What unfathomable level had that senior reached in sword-arts? A level beyond Skywind’s imagination, no doubt. He naturally wished to take on such a powerful figure as his master; even being a mere honorary disciple would be enough.

Alas, these two seniors were not so easily moved.

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A few hours later, young master Skywind’s process reached Dragonwing City.

Dragonwing City was quite a large city, and it had hundreds of millions of citizens dwelling within it. This was the headquarters of a World-level expert, and its streets were three thousand meters wide and filled with many beauty carriages. However, processions like Skywind’s which had more than three hundred knights were considered quite impressive in size.

“Youji, it’ll be up to you in a bit,” Ning said.

“Don’t worry, Master.” Su Youji was quite excited.

Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord accompanied young master Skywind as he entered the governor’s estate. They went into a guest hall, and none of the guards or servants in the estate were able to notice the three Daolords in the slightest.

The Dragonwing Governor was a World-level cultivator who had been living for an extremely long period of time, and Ning really didn’t have much talent in control. He was able to deal with Elder God Skywind simply because the disparity in power was absolutely overwhelming. Taking control over a World-level cultivator, however, would be a bit tougher. He

might succeed, but if the cultivator had a very tough mind he could very well fail.

The Ninedust Sectlord had no talent in this regard either, and so in the end Ning chose to have Su Youji handle things! Su Youji was skilled in the Dao of control and charm, and for her to deal with a World-level cultivator was simplicity itself.

“Haha. Skywind, you came!” Loud laughter rang out from behind the door. Moments later, a yellow-robed elder walked in, emanating the mighty aura of a Chaos Immortal. He did not, however, seem to be a World God as well.

“The Dragonwing Governor?” Suddenly, three figures appeared within the guest hall. One of the three, a woman dressed in fiery red robes, spoke out to him.

“Who are...” The Dragonwing Governor looked at Su Youji. He went stiff, then his eyes slowly glazed over.

“Do you know where the Samsara Daolords are?” Su Youji asked.

“The Samsara Daolords move about unpredictably. Although I’ve met one, I don’t know where he lives,” the Dragonwing Governor said.

Young master Skywind watched with amazement. Good heavens. The woman next to these two seniors was actually able to control the Dragonwing Governor like a golem? What level of people were these people on?!

“Then do you have a way to find a Samsara Daolord?” Su Youji asked.

“There’s a Chaos Immortal known as Immortal Slowseal. His master is a Samsara Daolord,” the Dragonwing Governor said. “It won’t be that hard to locate him. Once you find him, it’ll be easy to find his master.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord revealed looks of delight. Still, this planet truly was strange. The Samsara Daolords were all in hiding! This was completely different from the Endless Territories. They all felt that there had to be some secrets hidden in this place. Only by finding the Samsara Daolords would they be able to discern the secrets of this world.

“Oh?” Su Youji revealed a look of delight. She then used a secret art and sent out a streak of light from her forehead, sending it into the Dragonwing Governor’s forehead. Divine runes glowed within the governor’s eyes. A short while later, he regained consciousness, but a look of dread and fervor was now in his eyes as he looked towards Su Youji.

“Greetings, Mistress,” the Dragonwing Governor said respectfully.

Ning immediately understood that Su Youji must have taken full control over the Dragonwing Governor. In the past, Feixian the Exalted was extremely talented in this regard, and she was able to allow even Daolords to obey her command.

“How long will it take for us to find Immortal Slowseal?” Su Youji asked.

“Anywhere from a week to a month,” the Dragonwing Governor said.

Su Youji glanced at Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord. Ning said, “Governor, you should immediately begin to search for Immortal Slowseal. Once you find him, lead us to him immediately.”

“Hear that?” Su Youji looked at the governor, who frantically nodded.

“Understood,” the governor said. “I’ll go handle this right now.” He then immediately unleashed his Immortal energy, sending mental orders to his subordinates to locate Immortal Slowseal. He had been here for countless years and had many friends. It wouldn’t be too hard to locate the man.

The governor looked at Skywind, then revealed a smile. “Skywind, my dear nephew, I have to thank you. It was all thanks to you that I now have a chance to serve my new master.”

“Once this matter ends, I’ll dispel my secret art,” Su Youji said to Skywind.

“Please don’t, Mistress. I wish to serve you unto death,” the Dragonwing Governor said with agitation.

Skywind was stupefied. The governor’s memories and intelligence hadn’t been affected in the slightest, but he now was filled with the utmost of loyalty and dedication towards Su Youji.

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Ning and the others took up residence in Dragonwing City for now. They were all quite patient, and it was only through patience that they would ensure they would be able to survive this dangerous place. If they were impatient, they would die quick deaths.

On the fifth day of them being in the governor's estate.

Whoosh. A giant azure bird that was three thousand meters long was flying through the skies of Dragonwing City. A pavilion was located on top of the bird's back, and a simian-looking alien man was seated casually within the pavilion. He was surrounded by a large group of female servants, and one of them with the aura of an Ancestral Immortal was in his arms.

"We've arrived at Dragonwing City, my pretty. The kid named Skywind is in that city right now," the alien man said with a chuckle.

"I can't wait to see that look of rage and grief on his face," the woman said coquettishly.

In this planet, it was almost impossible to fly via magic treasures as the skies were sealed as though by edict. Most likely, only Samsara Daolords would be able to resist that disruptive power and use their Immortal energy and artifacts to fly. However, there were some natural creatures such as birds which were not bound, and so some cultivators would capture giant birds to serve as mounts.

"Skywind!" The alien man glanced downwards, then spoke out in a booming voice that was backed by his Immortal energy and which shook the governor's estate.

Soon, both the Dragonwing Governor and young master Skywind appeared in front of the courtyard. As for the giant bird, it slowly began to descend.

"Brother Mountainplume?" The Dragonwing Governor said hurriedly, "Have you come to bring Skywind to the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion? But the appointed date is more than half a year away. There was no need for you

to come so soon.”

Skywind glanced at the sharp-lipped, ape-faced man within the pavilion atop the giant bird, and also at the violet-robed woman in his arms. When he saw the violet-robed woman, his face turned pale and a look of grief appeared on his face.

“Skywind this is Immortal Mountainplume. He’s the eldest disciple of Swordlord Eastvoid and has entered the World level already. In the future, he’ll be your senior apprentice-brother,” the Dragonwing Governor said.

“You...” Skywind’s gaze was focused on the violet-robed woman, who merely smiled coldly in response.

“She’s my woman. How dare you stare at her like that?” The ape-faced man said coldly.

“Skywind!” The Dragonwing Governor barked softly.

Young master Skywind shook his head. “It’s nothing.”

“I’ve come on Master’s orders,” the ape-faced man said. “This kid, Skywind, has an impure Dao-heart and is not worthy of joining the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion. Kid, there’s no need for you to waste your time going to the pavilion.”

“What?” The Dragonwing Governor’s face turned pale. He said hurriedly, “We already came to an agreement, and the Windfiend Governor has already sent quite a few gifts...”

“We only said we’d give him a chance. He’d only be formally accepted once he passed our tests . Clearly, the kid failed.” The ape-faced man said coldly, “As for the Windfiend Governor, who gives a damn about him? Would he dare go against my master’s orders?”

The Dragonwing Governor had an ugly look on his face. As for young master Skywind, he ground his teeth, furious at the insult to his father and heartbroken by that woman. This was the only woman he had ever loved... but it had all been nothing more than a sinister ploy. To this very day, she was still causing trouble for him.

“Skywind, compared to Immortal Mountainplume you are absolutely nothing.” The violet-robed woman leaned against the ape-faced man, then let out a cold smile. “You want to become Swordmaster Eastvoid’s disciple? Stop dreaming. Go home and hide in your father’s protective embrace.”

“Become my master’s disciple? Even if you knelt in front of me and begged to be my disciple, I wouldn’t accept you,” the ape-faced man said mockingly.

Skywind’s face grew even uglier to behold.

“Endure it for now. Neither your father nor I can afford to make enemies out of the Eastvoid Sword Pavilion,” the Dragonwing Governor sent mentally.

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On the other side of the governor’s estate were Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord, who were sipping some wine alongside Su Youji. Their gazes were able to traverse the void and see everything which was happening in front of the estate.

Chapter 20: Learning From Heaven and Earth

“Master, I really don’t like the look of that ‘Immortal Mountainplume’ fellow.” Su Youji looked at Ji Ning.

Ning shook his head. “No rush.” He turned his gaze to the distant young master Skywind, then began to scry the young man’s destiny. It was quite difficult to scry the man’s future, as he was an Elder God who would soon reach the World level; to scry his future was extremely difficult. To scry his past, however, was fairly easy.

The future had yet to happen; all things were possible. The past, however, had already ended.

The Windfiend Governor was a World-level cultivator who had been alive for an extremely long period of time. He was a very tyrannical figure who had countless beautiful concubines. Although it was very difficult for World-level cultivators to have children, over the course of many years he sired a total of nine sons and daughters, with Skywind being the youngest of the nine. Skywind’s mother died when he was young, and so he was a very solitary person as a child. After he grew up, he eventually encountered a dazzling beauty known as Fairy Violetlotus.

Fairy Violetlotus was warm and gentle towards him, causing him to feel that the world was truly a beautiful place. He immediately felt certain that she would be his Dao-companion, his eternal Dao-companion.

Who would’ve thought that this most blissful period of his life would transform into a nightmare? The woman suddenly displayed an overwhelming level of power, crippling his cultivation base. She tortured him, sending his body into a hell of pain... but to him, the spiritual pain he suffered was far more nightmarish. His one and only love had transformed into nothing more than a cruel plotter. The only reason she had befriended him was to torment him to get back at the Windfiend Governor.

Later on, the Windfiend Governor found his son, saved him, restored and repaired his body, then helped his son return to the path of cultivation.

But from this day forth, young master Skywind's heart was forever filled with hidden pain. In fact, he decided that he would never feel love towards another woman again. And so, he began to roam the world, adventuring through its mountains and rivers.

The Windfiend Governor no longer held many hopes for his youngest son; he had always been a solitary figure, and he was very slow in cultivation. As a result, he chose to just let his son do as he pleased. Who would've thought that Skywind would suddenly take a liking to sword-arts while out touring the world? He became completely infatuated with sword-arts, taking on the natural world of Heaven and Earth as his master. He developed increasingly powerful sword-arts based on the natural world and soared into the skies. In just a hundred thousand years, he reached the Elder God stage and was virtually invincible within it.

"What?!" Ning revealed a stunned look.

"What's wrong?" Su Youji and the Ninedust Sectlord both looked towards Ning, puzzled.

"Nothing." But Ning was still unable to disguise his shock. This 'young master Skywind' had never trained under any master at all? He had learned from the workings of Heaven and Earth, yet had managed to reach his current level of cultivation?

Previously, when the Ninedust Sectlord had mocked his sword-arts as unspeakably crude, that was in comparison to Ji Ning. In truth, Skywind had reached an incredible level for an Elder God!

"He's actually this talented in sword-arts?" Ning glanced at the distant Skywind, then nodded slightly. "And he's not a bad person." Ning cared more about character when considering whether or not to take on a disciple; talent was of secondary concern.

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"Let's leave." Immortal Mountainplume and Fairy Violetlotus retired

into their pavilion atop the giant bird. While leaving, Fairy Violetlotus glanced sideways at young master Skywind, then smirked. "You'll never recover from this."

Young master Skywind just looked at her silently. Although he felt pain in his heart, he bore no hatred for her. Even the most detestable of people had their own pitiable attributes. The reason why Fairy Violetlotus had treated him like that was principally due to the great grudge she bore for the Windfiend Governor.

Whoosh. The flying beast spread its wings, then departed.

The Dragonwing Governor shook his head and sighed upon seeing this. "Skywind, Immortal Mountainplume must've caused trouble in secret. He's Swordmaster Eastvoid's favored disciple; if he's insistent on causing trouble, it'll be impossible for you to be able to enter the Swordmaster's tutelage."

"It's fine," young master Skywind said. "But Father will be very disappointed once he learns this."

"Skywind." A voice suddenly rang out by Skywind's ears. Skywind was stunned to hear this voice. It was Ji Ning's. "Come to me, immediately."

Young master Skywind didn't dare to tarry; he hurried ran towards Ning's residence.

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Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord all sat down to eat and drink. Right at this moment, young master Skywind came. He immediately bowed respectfully. "Greetings, seniors."

"Skywind." Ning looked at him.

"Senior." Skywind looked back at Ning.

Ning smiled at him. "You've been wanting to become my disciple, yes?"

Skywind was stunned for a moment, then was overjoyed and fell to his knees and kowtowed. "Your disciple greets you, Master."

"Darknorth, you...?" The Ninedust Sectlord was amazed, as was Su Youji.

They knew what level of power Ning had reached. If he publicly announced in the Endless Territories that he was about to accept a disciple, countless World-level geniuses would fight over the chance. In fact, there were even some Samsara Daolords who would come apprentice themselves to him.

Ning glanced at the Ninedust Sectlord and Su Youji, then chuckled. “I wanted to take him on, so I did.”

Ning acted in accordance with his heart when he chose disciples. When he had been in the alternate universe, he had taken a liking to ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding and so had taken him on as his second disciple.

When he saw the past of his third disciple, Skywind, Ning felt a hint of empathy for him. Skywind had been hurt by love, while Ning felt remorse and regret towards his own wife Yu Wei. Skywind was incredibly talented in the Dao of the Sword, and so focused all of his efforts on it. Ning suddenly decided to give the kid a chance.

“From this day forth, you shall be my third disciple,” Ning said. “Now that you are under my tutelage, you must obey my commands.”

“Understood,” Skywind immediately said gratefully.

“Mm.” Ning nodded, then stretched out a finger and waved it lightly. The tip of the finger tapped Skywind on his forehead. Instantly, a large amount of information poured into his mind.

There were cultivation techniques! The Dao of the Sword! Everything was transmitted to him!

The Sword Daos which Ning transmitted to him were, respectively, the [Blood Drop] sword-art, the [Shadowless] sword-art, the [Soleheart] sword-art, the [Yin-Yang] sword-art, and the [Heavenbreaker] sword-art. Any of the five would allow him to become a Daolord. Ning also left behind two powerful types of sword-intent; the first was of his first-stage Omega Sword Dao, the second was of his second-stage Sword Dao.

“These five sword-arts can be merged together. Only then shall you see my true Sword Dao. You should constantly meditate on these two types of

sword-intent. The amount you can comprehend, however, will be determined by your talent,” Ning said.

All cultivators had to walk their own paths if they wished to become a Daolord. Just teaching a few sword-stances wouldn't be of much help, and so Ning went ahead and gave him two memories of Ning's own sword-intent. Skywind was to meditate on them. Perhaps he would one day develop his own Dao of the Sword.

“When you are in danger, you can even summon these two streams of sword-intent forth from your mind. The first stream of sword-intent is capable of slaying most Daolords of the Third Step, while the second stream is capable of slaying of ordinary Daolords of the Fourth Step.

“The sword-intent is primarily meant to help you train in the Dao. Unless absolutely necessary, do not unleash them.

“Remember... all divine abilities and secret arts are outside sources of power. You can learn them, but you cannot abandon your own Sword Dao for them. The Dao is the foundation of everything,” Ning sent mentally.

He didn't transmit any divine abilities or secret arts. This planet was quite an extraordinary one; if his disciple wished to learn them, he could go adventure for them himself. And, to tell the truth, Ning really didn't have any good divine abilities or secret arts to pass on. The good ones he did have, such as the ones the deceased Sword Hegemon gave him, were not permitted to be taught to others!

Ning was also correct in stating that the 'Dao' was the foundation of all things. The more powerful your Dao is, the less meaningful those divine abilities, secret arts, and what-not were.

For example, when the Ninedust Sectlord used his divine ability, his divine power would instantly become a thousand times more powerful than before. However, his actual combat strength would only increase fractionally! This was because the power of his 'Dao' made up for most of his power in combat. If Ning became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, a single glance from him could cause ruinous damage. Thus far, he had merely reached the second-stage Omega Sword Dao, but the power of his sword-

intent was more greater than his novessence water and could easily annihilate Daolords of the Fourth Step.

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Skywind swore a lifeblood oath not to disobey Ning's commands. After completely receiving Ning's transmitted memories, a new, vast Dao was visible before him. The two sword-intents of an Omega Sword Dao... they would be lamps that guided him on his path of cultivation.

"Thank you, Master," young master Skywind said excitedly. These two streams of sword-intent were too unfathomably profound, but the five sword-arts formed a perfect circle that would guide him from all the way from being an Elder God to becoming a Daolord. Every single stance was described in great detail, and it also explained the process by which Ning gained insight into these Daos. They were of tremendous use to him.

"I won't get involved into your personal issues. You'll have to handle everything," Ning said.

"Understood," Skywind said. He did indeed have some things he wished to do, but in the past he was too weak. Now...

"Also, you need to stay by my side for a period of time," Ning said. "If you have any questions, I can answer them for you."

Sooner or later, he would leave this place. He certainly couldn't take this new disciple with him when he did, as each had their own paths to walk. This was how Ning treated his disciples. Take his second disciple for example; after transmitting the Dao to him, Ning immediately disappeared. That second disciple lived in a fairly ordinary mortal world, after all; this third disciple lived in a somewhat more powerful planet, and so Ning had left those two streams of sword-intent to ensure that he would be protected while he was weak.

As for afterwards? Whether he lived or died would be up to him.

Chapter 21: Immortal Slowseal

Nine more days went past before the Dragonwing Governor finally found traces of Immortal Slowseal.

“Master.” The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly came running to report to Su Youji, Ji Ning, and the Ninedust Sectlord. “Immortal Slowseal is currently a guest at the Hiddensea Palace, roughly a hundred million kilometers from this place. He’s quite some distance away. It’ll probably take us some time to get there, and so I’ve made the arrangements for transport birds and mounts to be prepared for us. We can head out whenever.”

“We’ll head out right now.” Ji Ning rose to his feet, then waved his hand and caused a black flying vessel to appear next to him.

“We’ll fly over?” Skywind and the Dragonwing Governor were rather speechless when they saw the vessel. It must be understood that this planet was bound by the edicts of an Eternal Emperor, and the invisible laws made it so that only Samsara Daolords were just barely able to fly. Samsara Daolords, however, were incredibly rare. Neither of the two had ever truly flown in the air before using magic treasures before; at most, they had flown on the backs of giant birds.

“Move it!” Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord were already aboard the vessel, and they barked impatiently to the others.

“Y-y-yes.” The Dragonwing Governor excitedly followed after them, and Skywind was similarly unable to disguise his excitement.

Swoosh. The black vessel burst into the skies, then immediately disappeared without a trace.

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Ning and the others had long ago acquired a local map of this planet from the Dragonwing Governor. They knew where the Hiddensea Palace was located, and the planet itself wasn’t that large; at most, it was a bit over one billion kilometers in diameter. The ordinary mortals on this

planet were fewer in number than even in the Three Realms, but on average they were more impressive as the rate at which they gave birth to Immortals and Fiendgods was far higher.

Swish! Just a few heartbeats later, the black vessel had already left the Dragonwing Governor's estate and arrived directly above the top of a cloud-piercing snowy mountain.

"Here we are," Ning said. "Hiddensea Palace is right below us."

"What? We arrived?" The Dragonwing Governor and Skywind stood at the prow of the ship, staring in astonishment at the scene below them. The mountain peak below them was covered with snow, with an ordinary-looking palace buried below it. This was Hiddensea Palace.

"We made it there in one breath." The Dragonwing Governor and Skywind exchanged glances. Both of them felt stunned. That had been simply too fast! To them, Hiddensea Palace was an extremely distant location that would only be reached through riding birds or mounts. The path was a dangerous, twisty one that needed careful navigation, and it would take them at least half a month to reach it.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord chuckled. "This ship can move at a hundred times the limits of the Heavenly Daos. A hundred million kilometers is nothing to it. You! Whats-your-face, Dragonwing Governor, right? Hurry on down and lead us to Immortal Slowseal."

"Understood. Skywind, follow me and stay behind me. As for the three of you?" The Dragonwing Governor hesitated.

"We'll go with you," the Ninedust Sectlord said calmly. "No one in this puny little palace can possibly see through our illusions."

"Understood." The Dragonwing Governor acknowledged the order.

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The Dragonwing Governor led the party while the other four temporarily followed behind him as he entered Hiddensea Palace. The former was a World-level cultivator, after all. He was on the same level as the Palace Lady and so was received with great courtesy.

“Dragonwing.” The Palace Lady was a black-robed woman who looked quite ordinary but who had an extraordinary demeanor.

“Hiddensea.” The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly rose to his feet.

“What suddenly brings you to my place? Dragonwing City is quite distant from my palace. To think that you made the long, hard trek here in person... might I ask, what is the reason behind this?” The Palace Lady smiled. Her gaze just briefly lingered on Ning and the rest of the four behind the Dragonwing Governor. She noticed nothing remarkable about them at all; the difference in power between them was simply too great.

The ‘long, hard trek’? The Dragonwing Governor couldn’t help but sigh to himself. It had all been done in the twinkling of an eye. However, he didn’t expose this. “Hiddensea, I’ve come to meet with fellow Daoist Slowseal.”

“Meet Slowseal?” The Palace Mistress frowned. “Immortal Slowseal is a rather bad-tempered person. If I didn’t have something important I needed him for, I would never have invited him over. Why are you causing problems for yourself?”

“I have something important to discuss as well,” the Dragonwing Governor said.

The Palace Mistress gave him a hard look, then nodded. “Fine. I’ll help you send word, but you know what Slowseal is like.”

“I do.” The Dragonwing Governor nodded.

A few moments passed as she conversed with Immortal Slowseal. “Let’s go. I just checked and Slowseal agreed to meet with you. I’ll take you to him.” She led the Dragonwing Governor deeper into the palace.

A short while later, they arrived within the most beautiful courtyard within the Hiddensea Palace. A horned, black-haired elder was seated within it, drinking some wine. When the Dragonwing Governor brought Ning and the others in, the black-haired elder’s eyes twitched. He glanced sideways at the four, then frowned and barked at the Palace Mistress, “Hiddensea, bringing in Dragonwing is one thing, but why have you

brought in a group of juniors?”

“I’m to blame for that.” The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly smiled. “It has nothing to do with Palace Mistress Hiddensea.”

The Palace Mistress just stood there silently. She knew quite well that Immortal Slowseal was doing this to knock the Dragonwing Governor down a few pegs.

“Hmph.” The black-haired elder let out a snort. “Throw these juniors out.”

“But...” The Dragonwing Governor was stunned. As for Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord, they revealed looks of resignation.

“Ugh.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a sigh, and as he did an invisible aura of power blasted out from around him, causing Skywind, the Dragonwind Governor, the Hiddensea Palace Mistress, and Immortal Slowseal to all feel their hearts quiver. The entire world seemed to have turned silent. Heaven and Earth had both vanished, leaving nothing else save his voice.

“I wanted to resolve this peacefully and have a nice chat with Immortal Slowseal’s master.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “I didn’t imagine him to be such a fool. It seems we’ll have to do things the hard way.

Ning and the others had indeed been planning on doing things peacefully. This planet was mysterious and inscrutable; they didn’t want to accidentally kick over a hornet’s nest. Unfortunately, this Immortal Slowseal was a bit too arrogant.

“What’s going on? Why is this happening? W-who are they?!” Immortal Slowseal was panicking, and the Hiddensea Palace Mistress was amazed as well.

“Slowseal actually has a Daolord as his master. It’s fine for him to be proud, but his pride goes too far.” Ning shook his head slightly as well. People truly did act differently once they had a powerful backer. In the Badlands Territory, if you encountered a disciple of the Badlands Court

you generally wouldn't dare to attack even if you were much stronger! As for the likes of the Skywood Sect of Skywood City, one of the eight Sacred Cities? Whenever the weakest members of Skywood Sect so much as mentioned their sect, World-level cultivators and weaker Daolords would be utterly terrified.

This was the good part of having a strong backer. This was why so many World-level cultivators wanted to join major schools, but the Badlands Court and Vastheaven Palace had very high standards. As for the Skywood Sect and other sects on its level, their standards were even more excessive. Thus, the World-level cultivators who weren't able to join the major sects were forced to hide in one place. When trouble came knocking, they had no choice but to fight head-on... and if they failed, they would die.

If you had a powerful background, even if you couldn't win the fight you could report your name and thus stay alive in that way.

It was much like what the Paragon of Pills had told Ning: "If you ever find yourself in a life-threatening situation, you can use my name!" Her being his backer would overawe many attackers.

"W-who are you?" Immortal Slowseal was rather panicked. "My Master is Daolord Feng Xian."

"Kid..." The Ninedust Sectlord's face was dark, and his voice was cold and grim. Waves suddenly arose in the area around him, swirling around him with torrential voice and filling Immortal Slowseal's entire field of vision, making him feel as though they were about to drown him. The power held within the waves caused Immortal Slowseal to feel a sense of endless terror. Horrified, Slowseal immediately produced a jade talisman, then crushed it with a cracking sound.

"My master is going to arrive soon! Don't do anything crazy!" Immortal Slowseal said, terrified.

"Hahaha..." The Ninedust Sectlord started to laugh.

"Haha..." Ning started to laugh as well. "Ninedust, I thought we'd have to threaten him a bit before his master would arrive. I never would've thought he'd panic so badly that he'd immediately crush a Dao-seal to

summon his master.”

“I was planning to torment him a bit. Now, it seems, he’s quite a clever boy.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a chuckle as the waves around him all vanished.

Everyone else, including Immortal Slowseal and Palace Mistress Hiddensea, felt their hearts quiver as their legs turned to jelly. Prior to this, Ning’s group had shown them no enmity and had completely masked their auras, making it so that Immortal Slowseal could sense no power at all. Now that they fully released their auras, they felt an instinctive, bone-deep terror in their hearts!

“W-where did all these terrifying figures come from?” Immortal Slowseal felt misery in his heart.

Chapter 22: Outlander Demons

At the very peak of a desolate mountain. A gray-robed man was seated here in the lotus position. He had been seated here for more than a hundred thousand years, ignoring the howling of the wind and the beating of the rain.

“In the end, this world is simply too small.” The gray-robed man raised his head to stare into the skies. “I need to do the same thing the other major powers did; leave this world, fight my way through the endless demons of the outlands, and then enter the wider world beyond. According to what the legendary Prophets said, the world beyond ours is vast and filled with countless cultivators. It is a world trillions of times greater than ours.”

“That place is the place I should be in!” A look of desire was in the gray-robed man’s eyes. Leaving this world and entering the outlands carried a high risk of death, but generations of Daolords continued to do just that. In the end, this world was simply too small, even smaller than the Three Realms. For figures as powerful as Daolords, spending a few dozen chaos cycles in such a small place left them with little to no interest in it at all. They wanted to explore the wider, more exciting world outside, especially after they had learned from the Prophets who had descended as to just how amazing that world was.

“But I’m not quite there yet. I should first become a Daolord of the Fourth Step. Then, I might perhaps be able to leave.” The gray-robed man nodded slowly.

Suddenly...

Bang! The gray-robed man suddenly turned his head to stare in a certain direction. He frowned. “Why is my disciple suddenly asking for rescue via his message-talisman?”

He truly was puzzled. This world was fairly small, and all the Daolords within it knew each other. As a result, even if they chose to punish his disciple for some reason they would first give him, Daolord Feng Xian, a

heads up. This particular disciple, Slowseal, was very attentive and obedient. As a result, Daolord Feng Xian liked him very much. In addition, Slowseal had no chance of becoming a Samsara Daolord, nor did he ever go out adventuring. That was why this didn't make sense.

He wasn't out adventuring and Daolords wouldn't attack him. Why then was he begging for aid?

Swoosh! Although quite puzzled, Daolord Feng Xian immediately flew into the skies towards the direction the plea had come from.

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A courtyard within the Hiddensea Palace.

Ji Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord were seated here casually, chatting and drinking wine. Skywind and the Dragonwing Governor stood next to them, while Palace Mistress Hiddensea hurriedly attended to their every need, pouring wine and delivering platters of fruit. As for Immortal Slowseal, he watched from a distance, his heart filled with terror and unease.

A short while later...

Whoosh. A figure suddenly descended from the skies.

"Master." Immortal Slowseal raised his head, a look of delight on his face.

"There he is." Ning, the Ninedust Sectlord, and Su Youji all turned their heads to stare at the gray-robed man descending from the skies. The man's gaze instantly fell upon Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

"Eh?" The gray-robed man's face changed. He was a Daolord of the Third Step; there was no way those three Daolords could mask their auras in front of him.

"Who are you?" the gray-robed man roared. He didn't care about Su Youji, but Ning's aura was that of a Daolord of the Third Step. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, his aura was even more powerful and terrifying than that of a Daolord of the Fourth Step!

“I’ve never met you three before. You shouldn’t be from our world.” The gray-robed man had an ugly look on his face as he roared angrily, “Are you outlander demons?!”

“Outlander demons?” The Dragonwing Governor and Skywind all stared at Ning’s group, stunned.

Outlander demons... here in this world, those things were creatures of nightmares! Once outlander demons appeared, everyone would pay any price necessary to wipe them out – this was a shared acknowledgement amongst all cultivators in this world! Skywind and the Dragonwing Governor had heard stories of outlander demons since they were young; they knew that every appearance of an outlander demon represented a calamity descending upon their world.

“Impossible. There’s no way my master could be an outlander demon.” Skywind couldn’t, wouldn’t, believe it.

“Outlander demons?” Ning’s group of three exchanged glances. This world was indeed filled with many flaming creatures who were known as outlander demons. They were incredibly powerful creatures, and some of them dared to enter this world. Although they would be suppressed by the might of this planet, ensuring that their power dropped dramatically, the ones who did dare to enter here were always amongst the most supreme of the flaming creatures and were at least at Ji Ning’s level. Some were even stronger!

But of course, upon entering this planet and being weakened by it they would become far weaker than Ning or the Ninedust Sectlord.

The gray-robed man immediately sent a message back to the sacred grounds. “Three strange figures have appeared, and their auras are at the Daolord level. One has an aura even stronger than that of a Daolord of the Fourth Step. I suspect he is a transformed demon from the outlands.”

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A beautiful underground palace located roughly 190 million kilometers beneath the ground. One of Daolord Feng Xian’s avatars was located here, and it immediately sent out the word.

“Three Daolords? One has an aura even greater than that of a Daolord of the Fourth Step?”

Within an ancient, still room. A white-robed elder was seated in the lotus position here, and by his side was a violet-robed man who was also seated in the lotus position. The walls around them were filled with countless ancient runes.

“They should be the two Prophets and their servant,” the white-robed elder said. “Inkmind, go and pay a visit to those two Prophets.”

“Acknowledged,” the violet-robed Daolord Inkmind said respectfully

Ning’s group was behaving with caution, but the ‘sacred grounds’ which had unified this planet were similarly cautious. The wealth which had been built up in the sacred grounds over the course of countless years was more than enough to stir Prophets with greed! That was exactly what had happened last time, and a disaster had befallen the world as a result. As a result, the sacred grounds behaved very cautiously. At first, they had been able to track Ning’s descent through the nine barriers around their world, but they were unable to track them afterwards.

They could’ve forcibly swept the world through their godsense, but they wanted to avoid unnecessary trouble. They chose to wait and see what the two Prophets would do first, leaving the initiative to them. Given how powerful the Prophets were, it was impossible for them to remain completely hidden within this world.

“You should know exactly how you should deal with the Prophets,” the white-robed elder said. “We naturally wish to act in a friendly manner, but if they leave us no choice then we can choose to battle them and wipe them out.”

“Understood,” Daolord Inkmind said respectfully. Last time, they were only forced to use a world-destroying measure to kill the Prophet because they had been caught off-guard. As a result, virtually all living creatures on the surface of the world had been wiped out as well. Fortunately, the ‘sacred grounds’ still held living beings within it, and over the course of countless years they slowly propagated to the point of allowing the world

to flourish once more. This time, if they felt that the Prophets were likely to cause trouble they would choose to immediately kill them!

Whoosh. Daolord Inkmind departed.

“We’ve never experienced two Prophets descending together. I hope things can be resolved peacefully,” the white-robed elder murmured softly in his room.

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The atmosphere in the courtyard was very tense and heavy. Daolord Feng Xian stared unblinkingly at Ning’s group, certain that they were outlander demons. The only people who came from the outlands were either demons or Prophets. Prophets? From the day this entire planet was created til now, there had only been three times that Prophets had descended. The chances of this happening were incredibly low. Although outlander demons were also fairly rare, they were far more common by comparison.

“There’s no way Master and the others are outlander demons.” The nearby Skywind continued to refuse to believe it.

Swoosh! Just two seconds after the two sides first began to face off, a golden vessel suddenly appeared in the skies.

“They came.” Daolord Feng Xian revealed a look of delight when he saw that flying vessel. The sacred grounds had sent him reinforcements. He truly hadn’t been certain of victory if he had to face this alone.

“They are incredibly fast. That ship moved at roughly a hundred times the speed of light.” Ning and the others raised their heads, watching the flying vessel approach them.

A violet-robed man walked out of the flying vessel, a smile on his face as he descended towards the courtyard.

“Brother Inkmind?” Daolord Feng Xian revealed a puzzled look. Daolord Inkmind had a fairly special position in the sacred grounds, because he was the retainer of their most important leader, the ‘Grand Elder’. However, Inkmind himself was merely a Daolord of the Second Step; he

was even weaker than Feng Xian. If even Feng Xian didn't feel confident in being able to deal with these outlander demons, what good would Inkmind be?

After Daolord Inkmind descended, he turned his gaze towards Ning's group of three. He had already seen the images of them piercing through the nine barriers and descend to their planet, and so he was able to recognize them at a glance.

"I am Inkmind. Greetings, Prophets." Daolord Inkmind bowed. "When the two of you passed through the nine celestial barriers, those of us in the sacred grounds immediately realized that you had arrived."

"Prophets?" Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord traded glances. So they had already been discovered when piercing through those nine barriers of mist? But they hadn't noticed anything at all! Still, it made sense; those nine barriers did indeed seem to have been artificially created by a major power.

"They are Prophets?" Daolord Feng Xian revealed a stunned look.

"Yes. To be precise, these two are Prophets." Daolord Inkmind nodded as he pointed towards Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord. "I've come on the orders of the Grand Elder. There's no mistaking it; these two are Prophets. Prophets, would you be willing to share my ship and journey to the sacred grounds? I trust many of your questions will be resolved once you do."

Chapter 23: Sacred Grounds

“Prophets?” The Dragonwing Governor, Palace Mistress Hiddensea, and Immortal Slowseal were all puzzled.

“Prophets?” Skywind looked at his master, Ji Ning, in confusion as well. None of them had ever heard of the term ‘Prophet’ before.

“Gentlemen?” Daolord Inkmind looked towards Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

The two exchanged a glance, then chuckled. The Ninedust Sectlord said, “Let’s go take a look. I want to see what the so-called ‘sacred grounds’ of this planet look like.”

“Youji, you can dispel your secret art now,” Ning instructed.

“Understood.” Su Youji nodded obediently, then released a strange rainbow light from her eyes as she glanced at the Dragonwing Governor. The latter felt dizzy for a moment, but when he regained his clarity of mind he quickly realized that he had spent the past period of time under the dazzlingly beautiful red-robed woman’s spell. Although she had already dispelled it, he still couldn’t help but feel a deep sense of veneration and desire towards her. He wanted to swear to forever serve her, but his rational mind told him to stay calm.

“Skywind, follow me.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both walked towards the golden flying vessel.

“Yes, Master.” Skywind and Su Youji both followed the two ‘Prophets’ as they entered the flying vessel.

Whoosh. Daolord Inkmind took control of the vessel, and the group of five quickly disappeared into the distant horizons.

Daolord Feng Xian watched as they left, a frown on his face. “Two Prophets have descended. If they truly are Prophets... I wonder if this will be a blessing or a disaster.”

As for the Dragonwing Governor, he raised his head to stare into the

skies. No matter how he tried, he couldn't wipe out Su Youji's image from his heart.

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Daolord Inkmind led them to a wooden house guarded over by a Daolord. A miniature teleportation array was set up within the wooden house, and it sent them directly into the depths of the earth.

190 million kilometers underground. Whoosh. Ning's group of five suddenly appeared out of nowhere within an enormous plaza that was studded with black gemstones.

"This is a palace of utterly enormous size, especially given that its underground. Judging from the power of the formations protecting it... someone truly impressive must have set this place up." Ning let out an amazed sigh. He saw endless ripples of terrifying power radiate out from the vast palace, with countless ancient seals and barriers active.

"This is our sacred underground palace which was created by the most powerful of the Prophets, our 'sacred ancestor'." Daolord Inkmind's eyes flashed with pride. "When the Sacred Ancestor descended upon our world, he guided us, taught us, and eventually completed his Daomerge here in our world, gaining eternity for himself. It was all thanks to him that we have had the chance to flourish."

"An Eternal Emperor?" Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were surprised. Even young master Skywind, who was following after them obediently, was secretly surprised. He had learned Ning's legacy and so he knew what the various levels of cultivation were. He knew that after the World level the next level was that of the Samsara Daolords, where each step represented walking a fine line between life and death. Above them was the level of Daomerged Eternal Emperors! According to what Ning's legacy had taught him, less than one in a hundred thousand ordinary Daolords would gain eternity and become Eternal Emperors. Their 'Sacred Ancestor' was actually one of them?

"Fellow Daoist Inkmind, tell me more. What are Prophets and who was this Sacred Ancestor?" Ning asked.

“Very well.” Daolord Inkmind nodded. “Long, long ago, living beings arose on our planet but knew nothing of cultivation. As a result, they lived brutish, barbaric lives. Every so often, outlander demons would descend upon the world, bringing death and despair to countless living beings. Everyone lived short, dangerous lives, with many being forced to hide deep underground in order to stay alive. But one day, the first Prophet descended from the outlands into our planet. His heart was filled with pity towards all living beings, and so he taught us cultivation techniques, allowing us to embark upon the path of cultivation. Only then did an era of cultivation arise within our planet, allowing our people to finally have the power to fight back against the outlander demons.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately understood. This person who had descended upon this world from the ‘outlands’ was most likely a cultivator of the Endless Territories who had come here, just as they had.

“After a very long period of time passed, the second Prophet descended upon our world. He was the one we call our ‘Sacred Ancestor’! He created the nine celestial barriers, making it difficult for outlander demons to descend upon our world. Eventually, he succeeded in his Daomerge and then established this underground palace, giving us a place for us to pass legacies down from generation to generation and ensuring that we would be able to grow and thrive even more.”

“The third Prophet to descend brought a great disaster upon us. He forced us to fight him, and although we were able to kill him, we suffered horrendous casualties.”

“Prophets.” Daolord Inkmind looked at Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord. “I’m telling you nothing but the truth. We are filled with gratitude towards the Prophets of the outlands. Without you Prophets having descended upon our world, we would still be living brutish and miserable lives.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged a glance. Both could tell that part of the reason this person had so ‘honestly’ told them the true history of their world was to display friendship, but the other part was to give them a veiled warning: We don’t want to fight you, but if you force us to then we’ll be able to wipe you out.

“I imagine the first three Prophets had their own reasons for descending upon this planet,” the Ninedust Sectlord said in a low voice. Although both him and Ning were quite cautious, neither of them were afraid. Both had valuable treasures they could use, and it wouldn’t be easy for the locals of this planet to deal with them.

“Perhaps the ancestral lands?” Daolord Inkmind suddenly said. The faces of both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord changed.

“So you really are here to visit the ancestral lands.” Daolord Inkmind waved his hand, causing a layer of blurry light to surround Skywind and Su Youji, blocking them off.

“There are some secrets which I cannot let them know,” Daolord Inkmind said. “Please do not be offended.”

“Mm.” Ning glanced at Skywind and Su Youji, then nodded. The barrier of Immortal energy was preventing the two from seeing what was happening on the other side, but they just waited there obediently instead of disrupting the power around them.

“The various generations of Prophets all came for the sake of the ancestral lands.” Daolord Inkmind waved his hand, producing a snow-white scroll. “Before the Sacred Ancestor departed, he left this with us. He instructed us to hand it over to any future Prophets and to let them read what he wrote within it, and that it would explain everything.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately turned to stare at the white scroll. The scroll emanated an aura which was very weak but which had the essence of eternity within it. Time no longer held any sway over this scroll at all; without any question, this came from an Eternal Emperor.

“Please take a look for yourselves.” Daolord Inkmind waved his hand, sending the white scroll before the two of them. It automatically unfurled on its own. The scroll was filled with many words, and both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stared intently at them.

The Sacred Ancestor was an Ancient cultivator known as Emperor Vulturas. He had also been teleported into the endless stone passageways by that spacetime array. Pursued by countless flaming creatures, he had

fled until he finally reached this planet. This planet, however, was not the actual site of the ancestral lands! It did, however, contain a treasure that negated the powers of those flaming creatures, a treasure known as the 'worldsplitter' stone. The worldsplitter stone could be carried or affixed to the surface of a magic treasure, and it could be used to permanently kill those flaming creatures!

The reason why this planet was resistant to the flaming beasts was the worldsplitter stone, making it the most important treasure the planet had to offer.

"So it was Patriarch Vulturas!" The Ninedust Sectlord revealed an excited look.

"Emperor Vulturas?" Ning's face changed as well.

In the Endless Territories, the three figures who stood at the very apex of power were without a doubt the three Hegemons! Below them, however, was a host of incredibly powerful Eternal Emperors. They might not be a match for the Hegemons in power, but some were strong enough that not even the Hegemons could slay them! Everyone had their own 'Dao', after all. By relying on the area they were strong in, they were able to escape even from Hegemons. But of course, if they were somehow restrained there would be nothing they could do. They were some of the most truly dominating figures of the Endless Territories, and they included the lords of the eight Sacred Cities of the Dao Alliance! The Aeonians, the Aberrants, the Ancient cultivators... they all held similarly powerful figures within their ranks, and there were some who had gone into seclusion who were even more powerful.

Emperor Vulturas was on the same level as the lords of the eight Sacred Cities. Amongst the Ancient cultivators, he was a person who was viewed as being second only to the Hegemons in power! According to the stories, he was a merciful and kind man. A person could pretend to be kind and virtuous for a period of time, but Emperor Vulturas had been alive for as long as the Brightshore Kingdom had been in existence. There was no way someone could feign virtue for that long. As a result, Emperor Vulturas had an extremely good reputation and was idolized by countless

cultivators.

“I never would’ve imagined that even in a strange place like this, he would do so many things for the local cultivators.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh in praise.

“I never would’ve thought that Patriarch Vulturas would’ve come to this place, and that he actually achieved his Daomerge here. How ancient is this ancestral site? Can it be the legendary...” When the Ninedust Sectlord thought of one of the Ancient legends, his eyes instantly lit up. He immediately asked, “So you are saying that by retrieving a worldsplitter stone, we’ll be able to leave this world, right? Quick, tell me where they are!”

Chapter 24: Underground Tombstones

“Worldsplitter stones are born from the very heart of this planet. They naturally are even deeper underground than we currently are.” Daolord Inkmind looked towards Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord. “Do the two of you wish to go now? Would you like to take a stroll around our underground palace and rest a bit first?”

“No need.” The Ninedust Sectlord rejected the offer.

This was the place where Patriarch Vulturas completed his Daomerge. However, the Ninedust Sectlord was an Ancient cultivator and thus knew very well that Patriarch Vulturas had seventy-two Ancient cultivator disciples. Although he was a very kind and beneficent man, he never casually transmitted the most powerful techniques he had developed to outsiders. At most, he’d transmit some of the second-class techniques he possessed... but the Ninedust Sectlord truly had no interest in those.

Just judging from the fact that Patriarch Vulturas completed his Daomerge here but was merely the second Prophet was proof that this ‘ancestral site’ was undoubtedly a terrifyingly ancient place. Most likely, it had something to do with some of the oldest legends of the Ancient cultivators. He could hardly wait to find out.

“Let’s just go down and take a look,” Ning said. He could tell that this so-called ‘sacred ground’ was still rather wary of them. Given the situation, it was best to keep a bit of distance between them.

“If that is your decision, then I’ll lead the two of you down.” Daolord Inkmind waved his hand, dispelling his Immortal energy and allowing Su Youji and Skywind to see and hear what was going on once more.

“Skywind.” Daolord Inkmind’s gaze turned towards young master Skywind. “Since you are the Prophet’s disciple, you are naturally permitted to go deeper underground as well. However, you had best not divulge anything you see or hear.”

“Understood,” young master Skywind said hurriedly. His heart was blazing with eagerness when he thought of how he was about to learn

some of the deepest secrets of his homeland.

“Let’s go!” Daolord Inkmind led the way, with Ning and the others following from behind.

Whoosh. They moved through the twists and turns of an ordinary-looking corridor within the palace, quickly arriving at an unfathomably deep downwards tunnel.

They immediately flew down towards the tunnel, with Ning bringing Skywind with him. Skywind certainly didn’t have the ability necessary to oppose the Emperor’s edict! They flew deeper and deeper into the abyss, flying more than three hundred million kilometers before finally landing.

“So beautiful.”

“Simply marvelous.” Ning and the others all stared at what appeared before them. This enormous cavern was filled with all types of colors and sights. The stone walls gleamed like gemstones, with some being fiery red and others being jade green or deep blue. They all emanated faint ripples of power, and as the different types of ripples coursed through them they all felt their souls at peace.

“We’ll be there in a short while.” Daolord Inkmind guided the way deftly up ahead, moving tens of thousands of kilometers with each step.

A short while later...

“What’s this?” Ning, the Ninedust Sectlord, Su Youji, and Skywind all stared at what was before them in astonishment. This enormous cavern was filled with tombstones! There had to be more than ten thousand of the things, and they stretched off into the distance.

Daolord Inkmind pointed up ahead towards the end of the cave, an area which was filled with blurry streaks of rainbow light. Vague humanoid silhouettes could be seen there. “There are flame demons outside. Countless earth devils live at the core of our planet as well, and they are just as powerful as the flame demons. However, because their natural habitat is the center of our planet, they aren’t weakened by our formations in the slightest. If you want worldsplitter stones, you’ll have to find them

yourselves. You'll have to slaughter a path through the earth devils, find the worldsplitter stones, then escape safely. If you aren't able to escape, then we'll erect a tomb for you here."

Daolord Inkmind pointed towards the many tombstones, then said in a soft voice, "These belong to many of our ancestors and built up over the course of countless years. Many came here seeking worldsplitter stones but ended up perishing. We weren't even able to recover their bodies, so we left behind tombstones for them here."

"You spoke of earth devils?" Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both frowned.

"How tough are they?" Ning asked.

"Tougher and stronger than the flame demons from the outlands," Daolord Inkmind said. "Based on the experience we accumulated... although they are less nimble and agile than the flame demons, they are even tougher to deal with. Amongst my people, only Daolods of the Fourth Step are permitted to enter the depths of this abyss in search of worldsplitter stones."

"You saw it yourselves." Daolord Inkmind gestured at the tombstones. "All these tombs? They each represent the death of a Daolord of the Fourth Step."

"All of them were Daolords of the Fourth Step?" Skywind, at the very back of the procession, couldn't help but feel shocked. Daolords of the Fourth Step were incredibly rare; how was it that his homeland had produced over ten thousand of them?

"How many Daolords has this world given birth to?" Ning was astonished. "How could so many of them have died here?"

It must be remembered that the Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom had produced less than a hundred thousand Daolords in total despite the passage of so many years.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord said calmly, "Darknorth, no need to be so surprised. Didn't you hear what he said? Patriarch Vulturas himself

completed his Daomerge here, but he was merely the second Prophet to descend! Patriarch Vulturas completed his Daomerge countless ages ago, which meant that this planet has existed for far longer than the Aeonian race or even the Brightshore Kingdom.”

“Honestly, we don’t have that many Daolords. In each era, we only see twenty or thirty of them,” Daolord Inkmind said. “The total number is high only because of how long we’ve been around for.”

Ning was secretly amazed. The Ancient cultivators truly were the most ancient civilization of them all. The history of this ancestral site ran farther back than the history of the entire Brightshore Kingdom.

“In the end, this planet of ours is too small. The various generations of Daolords all dream of visiting the outside world, and so they’ve all delved into the underground to seek the worldsplitter stones. When each finds one, that person is able to leave this world and visit the vaster world outside.” Daolord Inkmind said softly, “Even though the underground is dangerous and many have perished, successive generations of Daolords have continued on their quest.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both nodded slightly. All Daolords had incredibly determined Dao-hearts. This was true even for vile and demonic figures. If they wished to leave this place, no level of danger could stop them.

It must be understood that in the Endless Territories, the Verge-level Daolords would often venture into the Terror Starsea. Daolord Solesky had entered the incredibly dangerous Waveshift World, which had been left behind by Eternal Emperor Waveshift, the number one expert of the Dao of Numerancy. You could imagine how deadly it was!

“Given how much time has passed... although it might be difficult for this world of yours to give birth to an Eternal Emperor, I imagine it must’ve given birth to many Daolords of incredible power. I imagine some of them must have been able to acquire worldsplitter stones. Why didn’t they take out more? That way, there would be no need for the others to die.”

“Yes, we have indeed given birth to a number of incredible Daolords.” Daolord Inkmind said coldly, “However... the outlands are filled with endless flame demons and many other unknown creatures. If you don’t have the courage to venture underground to find worldsplitter stones for yourself, what right do you have to go to the outlands?”

“This is a tradition of my homeland. If you wish to leave, you must find a worldsplitter stone for yourself first. Only then can you leave.” Daolord Inkmind said calmly, “Over the course of so many years, more than ten thousand Daolords have successfully acquired worldsplitter stones and left for the outlands.”

The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly said, “Have any of the Daolords who left ever been able to return?”

Daolord Inkmind shook his head. “None!”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord felt stunned. Not a single one out of all those Daolords returned?

“Perhaps they were unable to find a way to contact us after they reached the vaster world outside,” Daolord Inkmind said. Ning and the others nodded. This was indeed quite possible.

They might’ve died, but they also might’ve survived but left this spacetime continuum. For example, in this region Ning and the others were unable to maintain contact with the outside world. Those who successfully left this region and entered the Endless territories. would probably also be unable to maintain contact with the ‘sacred grounds’ here.

“Even though the outlands might hold great danger, our Daolords have always wanted to give it a try. All of us are filled with curiosity towards the outlands,” Daolord Inkmind said. “Even if they aren’t able to come back, it doesn’t really matter.”

“Mm.” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed towards the rainbow-lit region at the end of the cavern. “So if we want worldsplitter stones, we should just charge straight inside?”

“No.” Daolord Inkmind shook his head as he stared at the rainbow region and the humanoid silhouettes within it. “I imagine you can see those earth devils yourself. Even from here, I can see more than three thousand of them! Based on the accumulated experiences of our Daolords, the earth devils like to drift about. Sometimes, the number of earth devils in a region will be lower than usual. If you can see less than five hundred from this position, that means they are now fairly dispersed. But of course, even then you’ll definitely encounter more than five hundred when you venture forth, as I’m merely talking about the ones visible from here.”

“If you can see less than a hundred, things will be even safer,” Daolord Inkmind said.

“A hundred? And usually how long does that take?” The Ninedust Sectlord was rather impatient.

“Generally speaking, this will happen once per chaos cycle,” Daolord Inkmind said.

“That’s far too long.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “Lower than five hundred?”

“Roughly once every million years,” Daolord Inkmind said.

“Still too long.” The Ninedust Sectlord truly wanted to charge in right away.

“If you only want to wait for lower than a thousand, ten thousand years should be enough,” Daolord Inkmind said. “But a thousand... that’ll be extremely dangerous. Only the most powerful of Daolords would have a chance of success.”

The Ninedust Sectlord turned to look at Ning. “Ten thousand years. That’s doable. What do you think, Darknorth?”

Ning nodded. “I don’t want to wait too long either. When we can see less than a thousand earth devils, we’ll enter.” Ning had only been training for a short period of time, while the Ninedust Sectlord was filled with eagerness towards the legacy of the Ancient cultivators. As a result, neither wished to tarry here too long. They had spent months surviving in

the ‘outlands’; they were quite confident in their abilities to acquire the worldsplitter stones.

Chapter 25: Skywind's Life

“The sacred grounds will send people to keep an eye on this place,” Daolord Inkmind said with a smile. “You can come with me to visit the underground palace, or you can wander around our planet and explore it a bit.”

“No need.” The Ninedust Sectlord said calmly, “I’ll wait right here.”

“Yes, there’s no need to trouble anyone. The two of us can simply wait here,” Ji Ning agreed. He then looked at the nearby Skywind. “Skywind, you can go out and engage in some exploration and adventuring. If you have any questions regarding the Dao of the Sword, you may come speak to me about them. After I acquire the worldsplitter stone, I’ll leave this planet. By then, you’ll have to rely on yourself.”

Skywind said respectfully, “Yes, Master. In truth, in the last few days since you transmitted the Dao of the Sword to me, I’ve gained many insights and am prepared to enter the World level already.”

“Skywind.” The nearby Daolord Inkmind smiled. “The sacred grounds have quite a few World-level cultivators. They are the disciples and servants of the various Daolords here. After you make your breakthrough, you can spar with them. You can also go and study from the various Sword Daos which the successive generations of our Daolords have left behind.”

“Understood.” Skywind revealed an excited look.

The nearby Ning nodded in approval. “Disciple, this is a wonderful opportunity for you. Don’t let it slip past you.”

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Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord spent the rest of their time quietly meditating underground, waiting for the right moment. The Ninedust Sectlord simply sat on the ground, while Ning used his temporal acceleration cottage. The sectlord was at a bottleneck and needed an epiphany to break through. Ning, in contrast, had just recently become a Daolord of the Second Step. He needed to seize every moment.

That very year, Skywind broke through to become a World-level cultivator. In the past, he had never had a good teacher; he had relied completely on his own natural talents to cultivate himself. Things were different, now that he had Ning's guidance. Ning was a perfect teacher for him, with the five sword-arts Ning having transmitted being perfect guides as to five different directions the Dao of the Sword could be developed towards.

Every ten years or so, he would come and ask Ning a question. He would also often leave the underground region to go to the sacred grounds and spar against the other World-level cultivators there.

"He's improving at a terrifying rate."

"Who the hell is this kid? I've never seen him here before."

"His name is Skywind. I hear that he's the disciple of one of the Prophets."

"A Prophet? No wonder he's this impressive. I heard that all Prophets are incredibly strong."

"His Sword Dao is simply incredible. I've never seen any World-level cultivator improve this quickly."

Thanks to Ning's temporal acceleration treasure, Skywind truly did improve remarkably fast. Three thousand years later, he had become a master-class World God... but of course, he had actually spent nearly three hundred thousand accelerated years within the spacetime treasure.

"No wonder the Prophet took a liking to him." The Grand Elder's avatar stared at Skywind from afar as the latter sparred with another opponent. The avatar nodded. "His talent for sword-arts truly is impressive. Inkmind, on my orders all of the Sword Dao legacies within the sacred grounds are to be made available to him."

"Ah?! B-but Grand Elder..." Daolord Inkmind was rather startled.

"Skywind is a member of our race," the Grand Elder said with a smile. And so, Skywind began to gain access to some peerless sword-arts legacies.

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“Master, your disciple has some questions to ask.” Every ten years, Skywind would come and ask Ning some questions. Each time, Ning would guide him through his queries and even personally spar with him to help him out.

Strictly speaking, Ning had spent far more time with Skywind than his other two disciples, Bluecliff Xiaoyu and Green Bamboo. Although Ning’s Primaltwin and Xiaoyu often met in the Three Realms, Xiaoyu was different from Ning; she wasn’t the type of person who was completely enthralled by cultivation. In contrast, Green Bamboo and Skywind were true cultivators.

“Master, your disciple has studied many of the sword-arts of the sacred grounds. Each time, you were able to easily point out the various flaws within them.” Skywind was puzzled. “Should I stop learning these sword-arts?”

“The five sword-arts I taught you represent five different avenues for developing the Dao of the Sword. All the sword-arts in the universe are unable to escape the reach of these five avenues.” Ning chuckled. “The more you study, the more it will benefit your mastery over my five sword-arts.”

“Ah.” Skywind was enlightened. In truth, the more sword-arts he studied, the more amazed he was by his master. Over the course of countless chaos cycles, the sacred grounds had produced quite a few Daolords of the Dao of the Sword. However, whenever he compared their sword-arts to his master’s sword-arts, especially his master’s Omega Sword Dao sword-intent, he always felt that they were much inferior.

Skywind was beginning to understand just how terrifyingly powerful his master truly was! The sacred grounds had built up an enormous collection of sword-arts, yet not a single one of them appeared to be a match for his master’s.

“You have spent five thousand years under my tutelage, and your sword-arts are comparable to that of supreme World Gods. Further instruction

will be of limited use to you. What you should do is go meditate and find a Dao which suits you the most, a Dao which you shall use to become a Samsara Daolord,” Ning said. “You can leave now. Go. Explore. Adventure. Here in the sacred grounds, you’ll never have a chance to truly temper yourself.”

“Understood,” Skywind said respectfully.

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He left the underground world, returning to the beautiful world outside. He resolved the enmities and feuds he had, then went out to adventure through the world!

Skywind slowly began to grow and mature. After two thousand years of adventuring, he possessed the power of a transcendent World God even though he didn’t have any particularly powerful treasures! By now, he was ready to break through to become a Samsara Daolord whenever he wished. However, he did not break through because he kept on having the feeling that the Daos he had developed were not what he was truly searching for.

His master’s five sword-arts all surpassed everything he was able to come up with. As for the Omega Sword Dao’s sword-intent, it was unimaginably superior. And so Skywind continued to search... search for a Dao he would be satisfied with.

The sacred grounds kept a quiet watch on him as well. When they realized he already had the power to become a Samsara Daolord whenever he wished, they showed themselves and began to help him when necessary. Skywind’s status in the sacred grounds quickly skyrocketed, and he was viewed as Samsara Daolords were!

“That’s Skywind.”

“That’s World God Skywind. He’s already come back.”

When Skywind returned to the sacred grounds, he attracted the attention of many of the Elder Gods, Ancestral Immortals, and World-level cultivators here. The news that he was capable of becoming a Samsara

Daolord whenever he wished had long ago been leaked to everyone; this was to ensure that no one would grumble or complain about the special status he had within the sacred grounds. In this planet, the sacred grounds held an overwhelming level of power over the rest of the world. There was no fear that anyone might attempt to harm him out of jealousy.

“Master, World God Skywind is nothing more than a World God. Why is everyone so excited?” A violet-robed woman quietly asked her master.

This woman was Violetlotus. Fairy Violetlotus was an extremely capable woman, and she was capable of doing anything to achieve her goals. After she learned of the existence of the ‘sacred grounds’, she came up with a way to become a member of a Samsara Daolord’s school! Later on, she managed to acquire one of just ten slots for cultivators to be sent into the sacred grounds and become one of them. She had never expected that Skywind had already become a World God.

“Ah, disciple... you don’t know this yet, but Skywind is no ordinary World God. The sacred grounds have many World Gods, but Skywind is the disciple of a Prophet. He is also incredibly powerful, and he has reached such heights in the Dao of the Sword that he can become a Samsara Daolord whenever he chooses.” Her master’s eyes glowed with excitement. “Do you know? The speed at which he became a World God and reached such heights of power is only equaled by some of the most legendary Daolords in the history of the sacred grounds. Given his current level of insight and the fact that he still refuses to make a breakthrough, he clearly wishes to develop an even more powerful Dao for himself and become an absolutely dominating Daolord. I’d be more than willing to become the retainer to a figure like him.”

Fairy Violetlotus was speechless. A complex look appeared on her face as she stared at the distant Skywind.

In truth, Skywind had seen her as well, but he had only given her a glance and then departed.

“Skywind...” Fairy Violetlotus watched silently as he left. Although she had repeatedly caused trouble for him and had actually tortured him, she

also felt certain strange, mixed emotions towards him. If it wasn't for that, she would've killed him long ago when he was very weak. The reason why she had tortured him but not killed him was due to the contradictory feelings she had in her heart.

“He just glanced at me, then ignored me? I wouldn't have cared if he came over to take revenge on me and kill me, but he didn't even glance a second time at me.” Fairy Violetlotus continued to stare silently, her fingernails digging deep into her palms.

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Ning was very pleased that his disciple Skywind was searching for a suitable Dao for himself. However, he wasn't really able to help out; it would all be up to Skywind himself.

He himself had only been able to join together his five Supreme Daos when he was within the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe. Finally, after reviving his parents in the Three Realms, his heart became peaceful and he was able to break through to master his Omega Sword Dao.

This disciple of his would have his own path to tread. Even if his disciple also embarked on the path of the Omega Sword Dao, every single cultivator's Dao would be different and unique in certain ways. There was no way any Samsara Daolord could completely imitate or train in the Dao of another; only the Dao they themselves created would be ideal for them.

“Darknorth, our chance has come,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“Yes.” Ning rose to his feet and walked out of his temporal acceleration cottage. They had waited here for twelve thousand years; it was now finally time for them to go retrieve the worldsplitter stones.

Chapter 26: The Battle in the World's Core

“Prophet.” Daolord Inkmind’s true body had been here this entire time, attending to their needs. Upon seeing Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord halt their cultivation, he hurriedly spoke out to them.

“Fellow Daoist Inkmind.” Ning smiled. “The time has now come for me and Ninedust to enter this place and search for worldsplitter stones. Sorry for making you go to the trouble of watching over us.”

“It was no trouble at all. Are the two of you truly unwilling to wait any longer?” Daolord Inkmind couldn’t help but try to dissuade them: “If you want a few hundred thousand years, the density of the earth devils might drop by a half, and the danger will drop to roughly 10% of what it is right now...”

The Ninedust Sectlord said calmly, “No need to wait any further. Darknorth, let’s go.”

“Let’s go.”

The Ninedust Sectlord and Ning simultaneously transformed into streaks of light, flying towards that enormous rainbow-lit region that led deeper underground. There were a number of those humanoid figures flying through that rainbow region. Each of them had tall, muscular bodies, wore black armor, and had faces that were dark yellow in color. They looked like towering mountains, and they emanated an aura of the world’s ponderance. This was a type of strange creature that possessed the power of the vast earth itself.

They were different from the flame demons. The flame demons were more violent and had more powerful attacks, while the earth devils always stayed within their own domain without proactively leaving to launch attacks on the world at large. However, anyone who dared to trespass into their homeland would suffer their merciless reprisals.

“Eh?” As Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord flew into the home of the earth

devils, the creatures suddenly turned alert. Moments ago, they had been quite relaxed; now, they all turned to glare towards the two intruders.

“Kill them!”

“Annihilate the intruders!”

Virtually all the earth devils in the area began to move in unison, transforming into streaks of light that shot towards the two of them.

“We can’t waste any time.. Let’s shake them off as soon as possible,” the Ninedust Sectlord suggested.

“Agreed.” As soon as the two entered, they had both sensed the dense and heavy earth energy which permeated this entire region and which applied enormous pressure to them. However, both were able to resist the pressure with ease! They also saw that there were many different stone passageways that led from this region to other places. The core of the world seemed almost like a spiderweb lattice of tunnels with countless short passageways that could be taken.

The passageways were so short that there was no way Ning could rely on his black vessel to flee. In this place, it wasn’t speed which mattered; it was agility! The countless short tunnels forced them to repeatedly change directions.

Boom! Ning didn’t hesitate at all, immediately unleashing his nine novessence arts and letting them crush outwards towards the encroaching earth devils.

“We Ancient cultivators also have certain secret arts of tremendous power, but the more powerful they are the harder it is to cultivate them.” The Ninedust Sectlord couldn’t help but feel a bit jealous when he saw Ning use the nine novessence arts. Both the Dao Alliance and the Ancient cultivators had many secret arts of incredible power. As for the terrifying secret arts Ning had acquired from the deceased Sword Hegemon, they were far more powerful than these nine novessence arts. However, the more powerful a secret art was, the higher its requirements were!

These secret arts would all require incredibly rare and valuable magic

treasures which were almost never sold to outsiders. The bloodfruit which Ning had acquired was a good example; there was no way Skywood City would ever sell sacred bloodfruit. After slaying Daolord Kongsan, Ning had become much wealthier than he had been... but alas, he hadn't been able to use that wealth to purchase any of the rare treasures he needed to train in the Hegemon's secret art.

Just gaining a basic level of skill in the Hegemon's secret art required three exceedingly valuable treasures. To master it, twelve were needed. Thus far, Ning hadn't found even one!

The same was true for the Ninedust Sectlord. Although he had been alive for far longer than Ning had and knew more secret arts, he hadn't been able to master even one secret art of tremendous power.

In truth, Daolord Allgod's nine novessence arts didn't rely that much on rare treasures; Dao lightning and Dao water were fairly weak and cheap. The true ingenuity of the nine arts lay in the way Daolord Allgod had mixed them together in an alchemical fashion, allowing him to perfectly control the [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water]. This was a type of secret art which possessed tremendous power while having fairly low material requirements... but actually training in it was incredibly difficult. Not only did it require one to be fairly proficient in those nine different types of Dao, it also required you to have reached the grandmaster level in alchemy.

"Break!" Ning manifested three heads and six arms, taking his six Northbow swords into his hands. He seemed to completely transform into a black hole, making it very difficult for the attacking earth devils to do anything to him.

Slash! Sword-light sliced through the chest of one of the earth devils. Moments later, the earth devil's body suddenly exploded with a giant boom. The shattered bits of its body were quickly ground into dust by the power of the nine novessence arts.

"Darknorth, your sword-arts have actually improved." The distant Ninedust Sectlord still had the presence of mind to jest with Ning. This

was mainly because they had been through far more dangerous situations when they had been fighting against the countless flame demons in the outlands.

“Just a little bit,” Ning said. Ning had used his temporal acceleration treasure for the past twelve thousand years, which he had spent almost exclusively in cultivation. However, aside from the Blood Drop sword-intent which he had broken through in quite some time ago, his other four types of sword-intent hadn’t improved in the slightest. As a result, he wasn’t much stronger than he had been in the past, even though his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop was now twice as powerful as before. If he wanted to improve overall, he would need for all five sword-intents to make breakthroughs, then merge together into his third-stage Omega Sword Dao.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The earth devils utilized heavy weapons like greataxes, warhammers, and heavy poles. They struck out with brutish power, and although Ning held the upper hand he still found each clash quite difficult to endure.

“Let’s run.”

“Agreed.”

After getting a basic understanding of how the earth devils fought, the two felt their hearts grow heavy. They were able to temporarily destroy the earth devils, but just like the flame demons they had unkillable forms! Fighting them head-on would severely slow down the two cultivators, and these creatures were even more dangerous than the flame demons when massed together. Fortunately, they were comparatively fewer in number.

Whoooosh. The two used agility techniques to flee while blocking, and they quickly darted through the countless web-like tunnels. Both of them were faster than the flame demons, and so they were significantly faster than the slower earth devils.

“Kill!” As they continued to flee, more earth devils were attracted by the sounds of combat and came charging straight towards them. Each time, the two cultivators had no choice but to end the battle as soon as possible

as they delved deeper and deeper into the earth's core.

The two were very experienced and very powerful, and they were working in concert. They were able to 'wander' through the underground lattice of tunnels for roughly an hour with ease.

"Over there." Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately saw the slick black stone that was hovering in the air off in the distance. It looked extremely smooth and glossy, and seemed to be filled with endless power, almost as though it held an entire massive world within it. Although this was the first time they had seen this stone, they immediately recognized it as a worldsplitter stone based on the descriptions Daolord Inkmind had given them.

"A worldsplitter stone." The Ninedust Sectlord was closer to it, and so he immediately waved his arm to collect it. He then grinned at Ning. "I'll hold onto this one for now. Let's keep exploring until we find a second one."

"Fine." Ning didn't really mind. The two had sworn lifeblood oaths long ago and thus both trusted each other quite a bit by now.

The worldsplitter stones had been birthed from the core of this planet. Although some could be found hovering around in outer regions like this place, most were located far deeper and closer to the heart of the world. Thus, the farther down they went the better their chances would be... but the more dangerous it would be as well, of course. It would also be a longer way back.

More time passed. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord continued to battle and charge their way closer and closer to the planet's core.

"That's..." Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord's faces both turned pale. Off in the distance, they saw streaks of light flying about happily. There were a total of four streaks, and they each possessed strange vitality and life energy. All four were of different colors, and their auras were completely different as well. However, they flew together in unison and 'chased' after each other.

"Four of the five types of Dragonfish Ki?" Ning immediately recognized those four streaks of light. They were incredibly famous

treasures that were absolutely priceless, far more valuable than Dao lightning or Dao water. They were incredibly rare and simply couldn't be bought on any market. Even if a major power was lucky enough to encounter them, he'd generally only trade it for other treasures of similar value rather than sell them. A single stream of Dragonfish Ki would be worth roughly eighty million cubes of chaos nectar; these things were even more valuable than sacred bloodfruit! One could imagine how rare they were.

“Darknorth, I only need one of those four.” The Ninedust Sectlord was so excited his entire body was shaking. If he acquired the Dragonfish Ki, then even if he found nothing else from this ancestral site he would still be completely satisfied. “This thing is extremely important to me. Brother Darknorth, please assist me. I can promise that the other three will be yours.”

Chapter 27: The Core

“Which one do you want?” Ji Ning asked.

“The water-attribute Dragonfish Ki.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. Although the two were working together, they were equal partners; the Ninedust Sectlord didn’t have the right to unilaterally choose which treasures he wanted. If Ning also deeply desired the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki, then it would end up going to whoever moved the fastest. The Ninedust Sectlord truly wasn’t confident in his chances, as the power of Ning’s nine novessence arts was truly great; if Ning was to apply all nine of them in chasing after treasures, his chances would probably be greater.

“To tell you the truth, I truly wish to acquire the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki as well.” Ning grinned when he saw the worried look on the Ninedust Sectlord’s face. “But... even if I did get it, it wouldn’t be of much use to me for now. Fine, fine; the water-attribute one is yours, but the other three are mine. I suppose I technically come out slightly ahead in this.”

“Thank you.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a sigh of relief. Sometimes, quantity wasn’t the most important thing when it came to procuring treasures, nor was the superficial ‘market price’. When you encountered a precious treasure that you were in desperate need of, you would easily be willing to pay five to ten times the ‘normal’ price! The real question was, how badly did you need it?

“Let’s move.”

“Don’t let the Dragonfish Ki escape.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord instantly began to make their moves.

The five types of Dragonfish Ki were aligned to the Five Elements, and four of those five types were before them – metal, wood, water, and fire. Ning’s greatest strength lay in his Sword Dao, with water and thunder in second position. Thus, Ning really did care more about the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki. However, even if he acquired it he would simply store it

away for now, because he didn't really need it for training in any secret arts at present. Perhaps in the future he would obtain a secret art which required such a treasure, but Ning's focus was on the deceased Sword Hegemon's secret art. That was a truly powerful secret art! It was quite unlikely that he'd be able to obtain anything more powerful than it.

Soon, the two of them fought through more than ten earth devils and acquired the four types of Dragonfish Ki.

"Hahaha!" The Ninedust Sectlord roared with laughter. "Finally, I'll be able to make yet another breakthrough in my secret art. The water-attribute Dragonfish Ki... I once offered a bounty of three hundred million cubes of chaos nectar for it, but no one was willing to accept it. Daolord Curveclaw of the Aberrants actually offered it to me for one billion! I was so angry I really wanted to just kill him."

"Treasures like this can only be hoped for, not counted on." Ning smiled.

"Thank you, Darknorth. Haha, you know? I'm starting to take a liking to you." The Ninedust Sectlord laughed merrily. "After we leave this ancestral site, if there's anything you need me to do I'll do it, so long as it isn't anything suicidal."

Ning immediately felt much more friendly towards the Ninedust Sectlord. Ninedust was the type of person who would do anything to achieve his goals, but he wasn't truly an evil man. The Ninedust Sect's evil reputation was primarily due to the evil deeds of the previous sectlord. The current Ninedust Sectlord was an Ancient cultivator and thus rather arrogant and aloof, and he was willing to do anything for the sake of his cultivation, but he would remember even the slightest of kindnesses or debts that he owed.

"If there's anything you need me to do I'll do it, so long as it isn't suicidal." This was quite a promise. The term 'suicidal' referred to something like Ning asking him to help Ning kill a Hegemon – that would be suicide! But if Ning said to him, "Come, let us venture into the Terror Starsea?" The Ninedust Sectlord would fearlessly accompany Ning into it, despite the many dangers involved.

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As a result of this minor affair, both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord became much more well-disposed towards each other. This often happened when Daolords adventured together. The term ‘lifelong friend’ often came as a result of friendships being forged through shared adversity in life-and-death situations.

“Why haven’t we been able to find a second worldsplitter stone?”

“We’ve spent another full hour in here.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord continued to go deeper and deeper into the planet, and the countless passageways continuously twisted downwards.

Although they had taken many twists and turns, both of them knew exactly where they were. They knew that they were moving closer to the core of the planet. Surprisingly enough, they didn’t encounter all that many earth devils on the way over; in fact, the closer they were to the core, the fewer in number the devils seemed to become.

“A worldsplitter stone.” They saw a levitating worldsplitter stone off in the distance. Ning instantly revealed a look of delight. They were now very deep inside the planet, but there were no earth devils nearby.

Swoosh. Ning immediately flew over and reached out, grabbing the worldsplitter stone with his hands. Moments later, he stared in front of him in surprise. The Ninedust Sectlord was right behind him, and he also stared in disbelief.

Right in front of them was an enormous globe that was pitch-black in color which emanated minute ripples of power. Ning, however, could just barely sense that these ripples were so powerful as to cause their hearts to quaver. Them listening to these ripples was like a pair of ants listening to the heartbeat of an enormous dragon; the terror they felt was innate and heartfelt.

“This must be the core of the planet,” the Ninedust Sectlord said softly. “This is the core of this entire world. It gave birth to all the earth devils, and also to the worldsplitter stones.”

“And the Dragonfish Ki.” Ning pointed off into the distance. The Ninedust Sectlord followed Ning’s gaze, only to see that there were four types of infant Dragonfish Ki being nurtured upon the outermost surface of the world’s core.

“Let’s go,” Ning said softly.

“Agreed. This isn’t a place for us to do as we please.” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t have the slightest intention of trying to take away the core.

When adventuring, if you wanted to live a long life you had to know your limits. This planet was capable of suppressing the countless flame demons of the outlands, ensuring that they didn’t dare to enter. A ripple from its core alone was enough to inspire fear in their hearts. The power of this planetary core vastly surpassed that of an ordinary Eternal Emperor. Both of them had the feeling that if they so much as touched the core, they would probably be instantly reduced to dust.

Whoosh. Whoosh. They quickly departed. On the way back, they encountered a number of earth devils but were able to quickly shake them off. Although the battles seemed fierce, in truth both were still distracted by thoughts of that enormous, pitch-black world core. What an utterly terrifying core that was! Ning estimated that only someone with the power of a Hegemon would have a chance at possibly procuring it.

“No wonder the living beings born on this planet all have such incredible talent for cultivation and are able to train so easily. This world is even smaller than the Three Realms, but in this era alone it has already given birth to twenty or thirty Daolords and a terrifying number of World-level cultivators. No wonder.” Ning secretly sighed.

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The Grand Elder’s avatar led a group of sixteen Daolords as they waited next to the tombstones. They stared afar at the rainbow region off in the distance which led to the world’s core.

“Elder, the two Prophets have been in there for too long. Is it possible that they...” A Daolord spoke out.

“It has been quite long.”

“Our Daolords rarely spent that much time in there.”

Generally speaking, if one wasn't able to acquire a worldsplitter stone in a fairly short period of time, one would quickly retreat and wait for another opportunity in the future.

“The Prophets won't die that easily,” the Grand Elder said. “Wait a while longer. They should be returning soon.”

Just a short while later. “There they are,” Daolord Inkmind said hurriedly.

Swoosh! Swosh! Two streaks of light quickly flew towards them from afar, pursued by a large number of earth devils. Ning's nine novessence arts swirled around him like nine dragons. With the Ninedust Sectlord's help, they managed to quickly throw off the pursuit of the earth devils. Even the most rare and powerful of earth devils were merely on par with the two of them, and even then they weren't as fast.

Whoosh. Whoosh. They flew out of the rainbow region, then landed at the entrance of the cave. They watched calmly as the many earth devils within the region issued threatening growls to the two of them. Slowly, the earth devils turned their attention away. So long as one retreated from their home, the creatures would not pursue them.

“Congratulations, Prophets.” The Grand Elder smiled.

“I need to train for a while.” The Ninedust Sectlord didn't waste words on ceremony. He waved his hand, causing a wooden house to descend before him. He then entered the wooden house, which was in truth an Eternal-class estate-treasure with incredibly strong defenses that were hard to breach. He sent mentally to Ning, “Darknorth, I need to train in my secret arts for a while. Two hours should be enough.”

Ning nodded, then turned to glance at the white-robed Grand Elder. He smiled. “Sorry for having troubled you in recent days. Ninedust and I have both acquired worldsplitter stones; this very day, we shall leave this world.”

The Grand Elder and the others all let out secret sighs of relief. It was best if the two left. By now, they were no longer cultivators who need 'Prophets' to transmit techniques to them. They had built up an enormous collection of skills after having embarked on the path of cultivation countless years ago. Although they were a bit weaker than any one of the Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom, they weren't that much weaker.

"I'll have to trouble you to watch over my disciple Skywind after our departure," Ning said.

"Don't worry. Skywind is a member of our sacred grounds and a member of our race. We'll spare no expense in helping him grow up and become stronger," the Grand Elder said.

Ning nodded.

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Skywind was seated at the desolate mountain in an area with no life at all. The only thing in front of him was endless sand, which contained tribal lifeforms within it. He just watched silently, his gaze travelling countless kilometers as he watched the various individuals celebrate and lament.

"I still can't let it all go." Skywind shook his head.

"Skywind." A surge of godsense swept towards Skywind, ringing out by his ears. "Your master, Prophet Darknorth, will be leaving our world today. He'll be venturing out into the outlands."

"Master is leaving?" Young master Skywind immediately rose to his feet. He knew very well that everything he had today, he had thanks to Ning's guidance. Many of the cultivators of this planet had once trained in the Dao of the Sword, but none of them had ever reached the level his master had reached. The information his master provided went to the core of the Dao of the Sword, and it seemed as though there were no sword-arts which puzzled his master. It was also thanks to his master's guidance that he had been able to improve so quickly.

“Master.” Skywind transformed into a sword-shadow. Thanks to the treasures and divine abilities he had acquired in the sacred grounds, he was already comparable to a Daolord of the First Step. And now, he immediately displayed his sword-arts for all to see as he quickly headed back home.

Chapter 28: The Shattered World

A vast grassland. The Grand Elder was here, leading a group of Daolords and Skywind in bidding Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord farewell.

“Master.” Skywind looked at Ning, truly unwilling to part with him. Ning had never asked anything of him and had whole-heartedly helped him this entire time. His father had given many costly gifts to convince Swordmaster Eastvoid to teach him, but the Swordmaster was nothing more than a World-level cultivator... and in the end, he hadn’t even accepted Skywind as a disciple. Compared to Ning, Swordmaster Eastvoid was absolutely nothing.

“Haha. Skywind, if destiny wills it, we shall meet again in the future,” Ning smiled.

“Right.” Skywind nodded heavily.

“Let’s go.” Ning glanced at the nearby Ninedust Sectlord, who pursed his lips into a smirk. “I didn’t take on any disciples. I can leave whenever.”

Swoosh! Swoosh! Skywind and the other Daolords watched as they instantly shot into the air, quickly charging into the gaseous barriers in the skies.

Skywind watched as Ning disappeared into the distance, tears appearing in his eyes. Would he ever have the chance to meet his master again?

“Your master Darknorth is very, very powerful.” The Grand Elder gently patted Skywind on the shoulders. “Skywind, you have to grow powerful as well if you want to catch up to him. Otherwise, how will you possibly become strong enough to venture into the outlands and search for him?”

“I understand.” Skywind nodded.

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Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord passed through the nine gaseous barriers, finally returning to the empty region surrounding the entire planet.

“What a marvelous place.” The Ninedust Sectlord glanced downwards. “This single, tiny little planet has actually given birth to so many cultivators that each era holds twenty to thirty Daolords. This single planet holds a level of power comparable to quite a few territories combined. It lives up to its reputation as an ancestral site of my Ancient race.”

“This planet might not necessarily be connected to your ancestors.” Ning turned to glance towards the outside. “Pick a direction.”

The area around them was vast and empty. Beyond this empty region were countless stone passageways that led off in many different directions. These stone passageways brimmed with flames; one could only imagine how many of those flame demons were present.

“Every direction seems to be the same. We came from this direction over there, so let’s take the opposite route.” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed to the other side of the planet.

“You read my mind.” Ning grinned, then waved his hand and produced a black flying vessel. The two immediately boarded the vessel. Swoosh! It instantly accelerated to move at a hundred times the speed of light, departing the planet. This entire ancestral site, including the planet they had been in, was dimensionally locked, preventing any form of teleportation or blinking.

“Here we go.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both stared towards the stone passageway as they moved closer and closer to it. Swish! The black vessel dove into one of the stone tunnels and into its roaring flames. When they saw a distant flame demon, both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord instantly used their worldsplitter stones.

Swish! Swish! Their armor and their weaponry all glowed with black light, covered by the effects of the worldsplitter stone.

“Kill!” The distant flame demon bellowed as it charged at them while also sending out an invisible vibration. Soon, many more flame demons appeared in the distance and began to furiously charge towards the two.

“Darknorth, take a look at this secret art of mine,” the Ninedust Sectlord

chuckled. His body instantly began to glow with a curtain of watery light that looked almost solid, as though waves had appeared in the area around him. The deep blue waves wildly smashed as the ripples spread beyond him, crashing into the attacking flame demons. The flame demons were all sent stumbling backwards as their speed dropped drastically.

The watery curtain of light surrounded Ning as well. Ning reached into the curtain to touch it with his hand, and as he did he could sense a surge of overwhelming power.

“What do you think?” the Ninedust Sectlord asked smugly.

“It is just as powerful as my secret art,” Ning said with a praising nod.

“Haha. This Ripplewater secret art of mine was created by an Eternal Emperor of my race. I am skilled in the Dao of Water, and so I started training in this secret art long ago. Only today have I finally mastered it.” The Ninedust Sectlord was in quite a good mood. “I’m currently a Daolord of the Third Step. Once I become a Daolord of the Fourth Step and reach an even higher level of understanding, my Ripplewater art will strengthen even further. Haha, when I fight against my peers, I’ll start off with this secret art to slow them down. Heh, heh, heh...”

“It seems you really took to heart the way I used my secret arts to suppress you,” Ning teased.

“Your secrets arts pissed me the hell off.” The Ninedust Sectlord had to chuckle as well. “Are you feeling jealous about my new breakthrough? Haha, even if I have to go back to the Endless Territories right now I would feel no regrets.”

As they chatted, more and more of the slowed-down flame demons began to gather around them and attack them. In the past, they would never have dared to let the flame demons congregate in such large numbers. Now that they had worldsplitter stones, they wanted to test the stones out for themselves and so they didn’t mind.

Even if they faced more than a hundred flame demons, they wouldn’t find it too hard to escape even if they didn’t have a worldsplitter stone.

“Die.” Ning transformed into his three-headed, six-armed form. Six Northbow swords were in his hands, and each one was covered with a layer of the worldsplitter stone’s power.

Swish! Sword-light howled through the air and chopped straight through the flame demons, cutting giant wounds into their bodies and stabbing gouging holes into them.

“Ahhh!” All of the flame demons who were stabbed through their armor let out miserable, powerless cries. Their eyes quickly turned dull and blank as their auras rapidly vanished. They were like snow melting in the heat of the summer sun. Some of the flame demons had clearly suffered just tiny wounds, but they vanished and their bodies were dispersed into flames, never to be reborn again.

“They die whenever they are so much as touched by the energy of the worldsplitter stones?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were shocked by how powerful the stones were. It seemed as though this was a natural counter for the flame demons; so long as you were able to breach their armor and wound them, they would invariably perish.

“That’ll make things easier.”

“This’ll be a hundred times simpler than I thought.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were both delighted, and they quickly began to advance at high speeds.

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Time passed on, day by day, as the two of them traversed one flaming stone tunnel after another. After finding nothing, they finally opted to enter one of the enormous stone corridors that were a million kilometers wide. In the past, these places were mortally dangerous to them. Now that they had worldsplitter stones, they could give them a try. These corridors had absolutely terrifying numbers of flame demons, with each group clustering in the thousands and some in the tens of thousands.

Even supported by both their secret arts and the worldsplitter stones, they found it incredibly hard to advance.

“These million kilometer tunnels are the main passageways.” Although they were surrounded by danger and often had to fight for their lives, they soon realized the good part of being in these massive tunnels. The smaller tunnels turned and twisted like spiderwebs, making it difficult to progress in any one direction. These main passageways, however, were all linked together in straight fashion, making it so that they didn’t have to twist and turn when trying to advance in a certain direction.

“Careful!”

BOOM. Ning helped the Ninedust Sectlord block a chop but was sent flying as a result. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, he took out a Dao-seal. BANG! A wild wind suddenly erupted, blowing back countless flame demons who found that they were completely unable to control their bodies.

“Let’s move!” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord hurriedly fled aboard their black vessel in a rather bedraggled fashion. Although the worldsplitter stones were banes to the flame demons, they had been surrounded and attacked by over a hundred thousand of the creatures, forcing both of them to go all-out and use some of their special treasures.

Bang! The flying vessel shot out of the enormous stone passageway.

“An empty region! Another empty region!” Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were overjoyed. Although they had merely spent twelve hours in the super-wide passageways, they had nearly died on three occasions. Each time, they had only survived thanks to their Dao-seals. Ning had used one of the Dao-seals left behind by Daolord Kongsan, while Ninedust had used up two seals of similar power. This was primarily because Ninedust’s protective abilities weren’t as formidable as Ning’s suit of Hegemon armor.

“We’ve finally reached an empty region again.” The two stood on the prow of the black vessel and stared off into the distance as the charging flame demons behind them began to slow down, almost as though they were afraid of something up ahead.

Up ahead was a stream of rainbow light that snaked through an empty

region that was over a hundred billion kilometers in size. At the very center of this region was the silhouette of a planet.

“Same as before?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged a glance. When they had been in Skywind’s homeland, they had seen something quite similar, a planet hidden within a massive, empty void.

Swoosh. They sent the vessel flying closer. The stream of light filled much of the void and thus covered the planet, making it hard for them to get a close look at it. By the time they were just a few hundred million kilometers away, they were able to see everything clearly. Within the rainbow light, they saw an utterly devastated planet that was covered with countless ‘wounds’. Next to it levitated two enormous fragments of another shattered planet.

“It’s been broken apart?” The two stared in disbelief at the devastated planet.

Chapter 29: Golden Sand

The shattered planet still emanated an aura of exalted might, but it would never be able to pose a threat to anyone ever again.

“How could it have been shattered?” The Ninedust Sectlord was in disbelief. “Not even an Eternal Emperor could’ve destroyed something like that. Only a Hegemon would’ve been able to do it. Could a Hegemon have come here and destroyed this planet?”

“Let’s land on the surface and take a look,” Ji Ning said.

“Alright. Maybe there are some leftover treasures,” the Ninedust Sectlord agreed. Both of them were very curious; what type of power could’ve shattered such a planet? It must be understood that first planet had a similar aura of power and had twenty to third Daolords at any given point in time, as well as a terrifying number of earth devils. There was no way such a powerful planet could be destroyed on a whim.

Swoosh. Swoosh. The two quickly flew closer to the planet.

“Careful.”

“Let’s halt here.” The two of them simultaneously noticed the danger up ahead and issued warnings to each other as they halted.

“The rainbow light...” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both stared at the rainbow light before them. The rainbow light spanned an area of a hundred billion kilometers, including the planet. “It... it actually is the remaining presence and aura of someone else.”

“How terrifying.” Ning felt stunned. They hadn’t noticed anything from far away, but upon moving closer they were able to sense and be shocked by the highly withdrawn and reserved aura of the rainbow light.

“That’s not light at all. Those are waves of energy.” After taking a careful look, Ning realized that this was a stream of diffused energy waves that would never, ever dissipate.

“Some inconceivably powerful figure must’ve struck through space and smashed the planet apart, causing it to shatter and crumble. The remnants

of the power left behind by that strike have taken the form of this rainbow light and been here ever since.” The Ninedust Sectlord took a careful look, then pointed towards a certain part of the rainbow light. “The rainbow light is denser over there. Most likely, that major power must’ve launched his attack from that direction.”

Ning nodded in agreement. This was indeed a killing blow from a major power, and it had the scent of eternity about it.

“The major power in question was very possibly a Hegemon, or close to it,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “However... given how much time has passed, there shouldn’t be much power left in the remnants of his strike. Let me try it out first.” As he spoke, he stretched out his right arm, which extended more than a thousand kilometers and passed through the rainbow light.

Crackle, crackle, crackle. The remnant energy within the rainbow light instantly began to crush down towards the Ninedust Sectlord’s arm! This caused his face to tighten slightly.

“How’d it go?” Ning asked.

“Not too bad. It’s just a bit of leftover power, after all; I feel like it is merely on par with our secret arts,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “The two of us can take it.”

Ning let out a sigh of relief, then said with amazement, “The remnant power of a single strike that was launched countless aeons ago is still on par with our secret arts... what power is this?!”

“Let’s go take a look at the planet. Although it’s been shattered, we might still find something nice here,” the Ninedust Sectlord said with a smile.

“Let’s go.” Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord flew carefully into the rainbow light. The energy within the rainbow light was folded in layers and contained hidden undercurrents to it. Ning activated his nine novessence arts and used them to form the Yin-Yang Sword Domain to protect them, while the Ninedust Sectlord used his own Ripplewater secret art. Together, the two managed to just barely resist the suppressive might

of the rainbow light.

“These two shattered halves are both enormous,” the Ninedust Sectlord said with a sigh. One of the two halves was eight hundred million kilometers long, while the second half was over five hundred million kilometers long.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord landed upon the tattered planet. It was in absolutely dire shape, with no living creatures on it at all, nor did it have any flame demons or earth devils or other strange creatures.

“How desolate. Let’s go underground and take a look at the core.” The planet where Skywind lived had a core that could give birth to worldsplitter stones, Dragonfish Ki, and other similar items. The two were naturally quite interested in the core of this planet as well.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Given that the entire planet had actually had essentially been smashed into two giant pieces, one could imagine what bad shape it was in. As a result, the two were able to fly directly into the core of the planet.

“The planet’s core is shattered as well. There’s nothing here capable of giving birth to new treasures,” Ning said. He swept the area with his gaze, unable to discover any treasures akin to worldsplitter stones or Dragonfish Ki.

“Darknorth, this time you are wrong. The planetary core itself is a treasure. Look!” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed towards a distant rift in the core. “That rift there is leaking a large amount of golden ‘sand’. There’s no way anything leaking from the core of this planet could possibly be anything but extraordinary.”

Ning chuckled, then nodded. The main issue was that there was simply far too much of the golden sand. The entire core was cracked, resulting in much of that golden sand having spilled outside of it. The region of spilled quicksand filled an area of over a hundred million kilometers.

“I still can’t tell what this golden quicksand is.” The Ninedust Sectlord made a grabbing motion towards a handful of quicksand on the ground.

Moments later, his face turned pale. He tugged viciously, causing all of the golden sand within the hundred million kilometer region to tremble slightly... but alas he wasn't able to pull it to him.

"Ninedust, you can't even pick up a handful of this sand?" Ning was startled by what he saw. He then chuckled teasingly, as he himself was beginning to realize how special and unusual the golden sand was.

"Why don't you test it out yourself." The Ninedust Sectlord gave Ning a hard look.

Ning reached out as well. It was quite easy for him to insert his fingers into the sand, but when he tried to pull out a handful of it he felt as though the sand was part of a complete whole.

BOOM! Although Ning used all the power he had, he was only able to cause the sand in the area to slightly tremble. He wasn't able to pull any out at all.

"Can't do it either, right?" The Ninedust Sectlord smirked.

"It reminds me of the stone passageways," Ning said. "When we tried to hack the stones apart, we felt a counter-force emanate from the entire passageway."

"Right." The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. "When we try to grab a handful of the sand, all of the sand in this entire area is fighting back against us."

The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly reached out once more. "Let me try a single grain of sand." These grains of sand were roughly the size of a fingernail, much larger than ordinary 'sand'. The Ninedust Sectlord let out a grunt as he pulled with all his strength. Boom! He managed to pull a single grain of sand into his hands.

"Now, let me try two."

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Both the Ninedust Sectlord and Ning were analyzing the sand of the planet's core with interest. Since this sand had filled the entire core, it had to be the core's primarily element. When undamaged, the planet's core

should've possessed enough power to wipe out the two of them with just the slightest of shockwaves. It was almost unbelievable that they managed to find a core of such power that was completely defenseless; there was no way the two would just pass such an opportunity up.

After a period of time, they verified that the more sand they tried to pull out at once, the stronger the resisting power from the rest of the sand would be. The difficulty level would quickly skyrocket.

"If we slowly pick this stuff up one grain at a time, it'll take us forever. Let me see if I can perhaps hack it apart with my sword." Ning pulled out a Northbow sword.

"Yes, if you can hack it apart into smaller pieces it'll be much easier." The Ninedust Sectlord stood back to watch.

"Chop!" Ning manifested [Three Heads, Six Arms] and gripped a single Northbow sword with all six arms, then unleashed his most powerful attack: Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker. BOOM! The sword slammed into the defenseless sand, but when it moved deeper and sought to sever a piece of it, an invisible source of power suddenly arose to stop it. The power of Ning's sword seemed to have sunk into a quagmire, having been completely absorbed by the endless sand and causing just a few vibrations.

"Won't work." Ning shook his head. "I can't cut it apart. I'm not even close to being strong enough."

"Master!"

"Master!"

"Hey, Master!"

One clear, child-like voice rang out after another as six adorable children appeared. All of them stared wide-eyed at Ning.

"Why have the six of you come out?" Ning chuckled. These six were the sword-spirits of the six Northbow swords. They were Lifeblood weapons, and so they were connected to Ning's spirit and essence. Ning almost viewed himself as their father.

“Master, the golden sand...” The first Northbow sword, ‘Boss Northbow’, hurriedly pointed to the flows of golden sand. “That golden sand is very important to us. We can sense it! Can you give it to us?”

“Very important to you?” Ning immediately understood. Lifeblood weapons needed to grow, but ordinary materials would be of no use to them. Clearly, the golden sand had attracted their interest.

“Yes.” The six children nodded simultaneously.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord watched with amusement. “You actually have SIX of those Lifeblood swords? Not bad, Darknorth.”

Ning couldn’t be bothered to banter with him for now. He said to the six children, “But there’s no way for me to harvest or mine the golden sand.”

“No need. Master, just insert us into it.”

“Yes, insert us into it. Let us absorb it into us.” All six of the children continued to stare at Ning.

Chapter 30: The Growing Northbow Swords

Ji Ning was delighted when he heard this. He waved his hand, causing all six black swords to fly out from the sheath on his back and into the sea of flowing sand.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! They all plunged deep into the sand.

“Haha!”

“Here we go!”

“Oh, this is lovely.”

“Mm...”

The six children let out excited cries as they flew back into their respective swords. The six Northbow swords began to glow with a layer of golden light as the sand around them began to lose its luster, quickly changing to become a grayish-white color before then completely disappearing without a trace.

“In the future, if you encounter anything you like you can just let me know,” Ning sent mentally to his six sword-spirits.

“We don’t know what we like either. We can only sense something we want from a close distance.”

“Right! Master, if you find anything powerful in the future, give it a few whacks with us first and we’ll get a good sense of it,” the six sword-spirits replied in chorus.

Ning laughed, a smile on his face as he watched the six Northbow swords furiously devour the essence of the golden sands around them. A large amount of golden sand was being rapidly converted into white dust and then vanish. In the twinkling of an eye, more than half the golden sand in a thirty meter area had completely vanished.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord was rather jealous when he saw this. He

hurriedly lifted up his longstaff, then plunged it into the golden sand.

“Ugh.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head, putting away his longstaff. He glanced at Ning. “Congratulations, Darknorth. It seems your Lifeblood weapons are able to absorb the golden sand quite rapidly. Why is it that my own Lifeblood weapon can make no use of it?”

“I guess they aren’t a good fit for each other,” Ning laughed.

The Endless Territories were filled with countless marvelous curios, but only a few of them would be suitable for each person. Ning’s six Northbow swords had been personally forged to perfection by Emperor Gonflame, as perfection was needed in order to match Ning’s own Dao. They were already nigh-flawless and thus very picky; thus far, they had shown no interest in anything Ning had encountered.

Whooooosh. Entire swathes of golden dust turned white and then vanished.

“This golden sand can be considered a type of treasure. Actually harvesting it, however, is a pain.” The Ninedust Sectlord laboriously gathered the golden sand to himself, two grains at a time. After more than two hours, he had only managed to gather roughly a washing basin’s worth of sand. By the time he turned to look at Ning, he realized that virtually all of the golden sand around them had been sucked away. He could do nothing but shake his head and sigh. “Compared to how fast your Lifeblood weapons are harvesting these things, I’m moving at a snail’s pace. Mm. Well, I’ll keep harvesting. In the future I’ll ask and find out what type of treasure this is.”

Ning smiled as he watched, his mood excellent. He could sense that his six Northbow swords were slowly growing in power as they themselves began to transform and evolve. They had originally been black in color but now they were starting to be tinged with gold, almost as though their abyssal darkness was now brimming with faint golden light. They were beginning to look like dark gold.

Four hours. Twelve hours. One day. Two days. One month. Two months...

The six Northbow swords remained plunged into the golden sands that had leaked out of the shattered planet, furiously sucking away at the sand's essence. Not only were they changing in color, they were even changing in shape. They were now even slimmer than before, but their tips and edges were much sharper. Just looking at them, one could sense a terrifying aura of power from them.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord had been fairly relaxed at first, but as time passed both of them grew increasingly astonished. As the Northbow swords had continuously drawn in more of the golden sands and evolved, the rate at which they drew in the sand began to dramatically increase as well.

Rumble...

The entire sea of golden sand was rumbling and rolling about, because the golden sands at its deepest depths were being continuously wiped out. As a result, 'waves' were sweeping through the sea unceasingly and flowing towards the six Northbow swords that had been inserted into the heart of the shattered planet's core.

"Your Lifeblood weapons aren't going to suck up all of the golden sand of this planet's core, are they? When in perfect condition, the planet's core possessed such power that neither of us would even dare to approach it. If your weapons somehow managed to absorb all of that power... how strong would they become?" The Ninedust Sectlord stared in slack-jawed amazement. It must be understood that the outer layer of the hundred-million-kilometer sea of golden sand had already completely vanished. The swords were now primarily drawing from the sands deep within the sea.

"The more powerful, the better." Ning smiled. "This is an ancestral site of you Ancient cultivators; I imagine there won't be any legacies for me here. I need to get what I can out of this place."

The Northbow swords had completely transformed by now. They were now extremely thin, completely golden in color, and glowed with a layer of light. If other cultivators saw these new Northbow swords, they never

would've believed that they were the same swords as Ning had been wielding just a short while ago.

Ning continued to watch eagerly. The planet's core was truly an incalculably valuable treasure; most likely, its value was comparable to that mountain of darkspace flamestone in the alternate universe. His swords had already absorbed so much of that precious golden sand that they had undergone a fundamental transformation.

Boom. Boom. Boom. A series of booms rang out, followed by the six Northbow swords flying into the skies and towards Ning.

"Master, I'm full."

"I can't eat another bite."

"I feel wonderfully stuffed."

The six children appeared once more on the blades of the Northbow swords, incredibly excited. With but a thought, Ning sent all six swords flying into the sheath on his back.

"Look! Look over there!" The Ninedust Sectlord pointed at the planet's core. Your six swords must've drained roughly twenty to thirty percent of the golden sand. I daresay that in material quality, they have a shot of becoming Universe treasures."

Ning waved his hand, pulling out one of the Northbow swords. "Let me test one out first." Ning felt extremely comfortable when holding that Northbow sword, and its entire body glowed with that golden light.

Swish. Swish. Ning began to display his sword-arts. He first started with his defensive sword-arts, because judging from how thin, slender, and sharp the sword was he felt certain that its offensive properties would have been strengthened. He wanted to savor this and save the best for last, and so he decided to test out his defensive sword-arts first. Upon doing so, Ning discovered to his joy that his sword-arts came out even faster and more fluid than ever before. They were also significantly more powerful as well; most likely, his defensive prowess had increased by fifty to sixty percent.

“Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker!” Ning unleashed a furious chop. BOOM! A stream of sword-light visible to the naked eye flew out from the tip of the sword, slamming down through the rainbow light for several kilometers before finally dissipating.

“It’s merely twice as strong as before.” Ning shook his head slightly; this would be of limited use to him.

“Omega Sword Dao – Shadowless!” Next, Ning chose to test out the Shadowless stance. This instantly caused a look of joy to appear on Ning’s face, as the new Northbow sword was perfect for the Shadowless stance; it was now faster, sharper, more ethereal, and more unpredictable.

“This one is four times stronger than before,” Ning estimated.

“Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop!” Ning struck out with a seemingly casual stab, but in the final instant of the strike the sword-light twisted slightly. It destroyed the local power of the Dao-aura unleashed by the prime essences of the universe, forming a true void.

“What?!” The nearby Ninedust Sectlord cried out in shock, “Y-you... your sword has actually transcended space itself?”

“It’s actually transcended space.” Ning revealed a delight look as well.

The technique which Emperor Mirrorsnow had mastered and used to gain eternity for himself was a sword-art that transcended both space and time, allowing him to pierce through his enemies even from countless kilometers away. Neither space nor time could constrain his sword-arts, and his enemies would be dead before they even had a chance to react. The power of this attack was simply incredible.

To surpass the limits of time was to be inconceivably fast. As soon as Emperor Mirrorsnow struck, his sword would slay his foe; there would be no ‘attack time’ at all, as the attack would be instantaneous. This was what made transcending time so terrifying.

As for transcending space, it meant that distance was no longer an obstacle. Emperor Mirrorsnow was capable of using his sword to slay an enemy who wasn’t even in the same territory as him!

Transcending space was comparatively easier. Transcending time was extremely difficult! Ning had originally thought that when he became a Daolord of the Third Step, his sword-arts would be able to transcend space. Who would've thought that he'd accomplish it at the second step! But still, when he thought about it in detail, it made sense to him. The essence the Northbow swords had absorbed had caused them to be extremely 'skewed' in one area, whereas they had previously been balanced. They were now much sharper and thus better-suited to the Blood Drop stance! The Shadowless stance wasn't improved as much, while the berserk Heavenbreaker stance was barely improved. As for his defensive sword-arts, they were improved the least of all.

In addition to his swords now being more suited to the Blood Drop stance, Ning had improved the most in the Blood Drop sword-intent to begin with. The Blood Drop sword-intent was highly destructive and thus suited for tearing through the bonds of space and time; it naturally became the first technique he could use to succeed in transcending space.

"Now that you've transcended space, ordinary dimensional bindings will no longer have an effect on you. Even if an Eternal Emperor wished to kill you, you would be able to easily pierce through the dimensions and then flee through a dimensional tunnel. Only an Eternal Emperor who is incredibly skilled in the Dao of Space would have a chance of tying you down, with the vast majority of them being helpless against you." The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning, then let out a sigh. "Darknorth, from this day forth, you now have a true life-saving measure that you can use when you please. Very, very few people are now capable of slaying you. You've transcended the bounds of space... I have to admit, I truly envy you now."

Chapter 31: The Ancient Ancestor

Ji Ning laughed. When he had been at Skywood City and encountered Daolord Kongsan, the latter had dimensionally locked the area with a formation, making it impossible Ning to escape; his only option would've been to use his vessel to slowly fly around inside! But now? His sword-arts surpassed the limits of space and were able to forcibly rip out dimensional passageways, allowing him to easily escape. Only someone who had reached an extremely high level in the Dao of Space would be able to restrict Ning's movements.

The vast majority of Eternal Emperors would not be able to bar Ning's path. This was a true life-preserving method he now had!

Kongsan was able to transform into darkness incarnate, a virtually unkillable form. This was his own life-preserving method which ensured that even the likes of Palace Lord Dawnstar would be unable to do anything to him.

Ji Ning would be able to use his swords to transcend space, making it so that dimensional shackling would be unable to bind him. He would also be able to tear through space and flee at a moment's notice. This was a life-preserving method that was every bit a match for Kongsan's.

There were very few figures even amongst exceptionally powerful second-tier Daolords like Ning and Kongsan who had such incredible life-preserving methods. The Ninedust Sectlord, for example, didn't have any such technique.

However, the most supreme of Daolords such as Dawnstar or Skyaxe, the ones who stood at the very precipice of power, all had Daos of such incredible power that they had life-preserving abilities similar to that of spatial transcendence.

This was why they were all generally extremely difficult to kill. However, a Hegemon would probably be able to wipe them out with the wave of a hand. Perhaps some of the freakishly powerful ancient figures such as the lords of the eight Sacred Cities, second only to the Hegemons in power

and who Hegemons wouldn't necessarily be able to kill, might be able to slay the supreme Daolords. These figures were far more powerful than even Emperor Mirrorsnow.

However, Hegemons and near-Hegemons were incredibly rare and exalted figures. The three Hegemons belonged to the Brightshore Kingdom, the Aberrant special lifeforms, and the Ancient cultivators. These three were the rules and sovereigns their entire race. As for the near-Hegemons, they were amongst the most powerful figures each race or organization had. For now, Ning wasn't at a level where he could get embroiled into fights with them.

"Don't feel jealous of me. Once you become a Daolord of the Fourth Step, I'm sure you'll have access to a formidable protective ability of your own," Ning said. The Ninedust Sectlord had merged two Supreme Daos together, which meant that when he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step he would instantly become one of the most powerful Daolords around. None of those Daolords would be easy to deal with.

"True." The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. "I'm not too far away from breaking through to the fourth step anyhow. With just a few more insights, I'll be able to break through my bottleneck and reach the final step. By then, my mastery over water will easily allow me to gain an 'undying waterform body'.

Ning chuckled and nodded.

An 'undying waterform body' was a fairly common technique amongst those who had reached an extremely high level in the Dao of Water. This was a technique that was much stronger than Kongsan's ability to dissolve into darkness incarnate. Kongsan had only comprehended a single Supreme Dao, after all; his 'darkness incarnate' form was simply not flawless enough.

"By then, I can just stand there and let you hit me without fighting back, but you still won't be able to injure me," the Ninedust Sectlord boasted smugly.

"Oh." Ning mumbled mentally to himself, you know, I'm actually just a

Daolord of the Second Step...

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The Ninedust Sectlord had mastered his Ripplewater secret art, while Ning had now evolved his lifeblood weapons. Both had benefited significantly from this adventure.

“Let’s go.” Ning stood atop the surface of the shattered planet. “The only thing of value here was the core, but harvesting it is too difficult.”

“It really is, but you made a killing off of it...” The Ninedust Sectlord chuckled as he scanned his surroundings, then pointed to the source of the rainbow light. “Let’s move over there. The rainbow light is denser over there; that should be the direction from which the ancient power launched the strike.”

“Yes, let’s go take a look.”

The two immediately flew off the planet and towards the rainbow light. They flew several hundred kilometers alongside the light stream, moving towards the source. Both of them were quite curious; this was an ancestral site of the Ancient cultivators. Who could’ve been able to destroy a planet such as this? Most likely, only a Hegemon-level figure or someone close to that level of power.

Swish! They traversed through space and reached the end of the rainbow light.

“What’s that?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stared in amazement at the cluster of stone passageways ahead of them. The stone passageways were brimming with flame demons, but the streak of rainbow light flew straight through the stone passageways... and the place it flew through was an absolutely enormous straight passageway that was at least two billion kilometers wide! Based on the other nearby tunnels, it could be ascertained that the ‘rainbow passageway’ was actually once filled with countless stone passageways that had been completely destroyed.

“How terrifying,” the Ninedust Sectlord murmured. “A single strike blasted through countless stone passageways, forming a single enormous

one in their stead... and then, after being weakened due to having gone through so many passageways, continued through to blast apart that planet! It had to have been a Hegemon.”

“I agree that only a Hegemon could’ve done such a thing,” Ning concurred.

This level of power was incredible. Both of them had learned for themselves how tough the stone passageways were, but someone had been able to blast through two billion kilometers worth of stone then shatter that planet with a single strike. This level of power was beyond their imagination. As they saw it, only the nigh-omnipotent Hegemons could’ve done such a thing.

“This place must really be that legendary place...” Waves of shock and awe began to fill the Ninedust Sectlord’s heart as he grew certain of his guess.

“Come, Ninedust. Let’s go through and see what lies on the other end of the rainbow passageway,” Ning said.

“Agreed.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. The two then flew into the rainbow passageway.

The rainbow passageway was brimming with remnant power. There was simply no way to avoid it, and so both used their secret arts to resist as best possible. After being ablated by their secret arts, the remnant power no longer posed a threat to them at all when it washed over their divine bodies.

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The rainbow passageway was two billion kilometers wide and so long that they couldn’t see to the end of it. The two followed the rainbow light, forging a pathway forwards. The closer they moved to the source, the stronger the layers of power became. However, they were both able to hold; for now, they had yet to reach their limits.

The Ninedust Sectlord sent mentally, “If we were pulled into a fight, I’d only be able to unleash around 20% of my full power right now. This is

absolutely terrifying. The remnant power from a single strike that was unleashed countless aeons ago is still able to suppress me to such an extent!”

“I’ve been whittled down to a fraction of my full power as well,” Ning said. He had the Hegemon’s armor, allowing him to endure the damage, but the fact that the remnant energy was so omnipresent meant that he would at most be able to pull out 30%-40% of his true power when using sword-arts.

They continued to fly forwards.

“Is that an entrance up ahead?” Ning was rather puzzled. The rainbow light lowered visibility, but he could vaguely see that the end was up ahead.

“It does look like that.” The Ninedust Sectlord gripped his longstaff and sent mentally, “Be careful, Darknorth. Let’s not lose our lives at the very end of this journey.”

“Agreed.” Ning manifested three heads and six arms and wielded his six Northbow swords with great caution.

Swoosh! Swoosh! There really was an exit at the end of the rainbow tunnel. When they simultaneously flew through the tunnel, they suddenly felt their bodies expanding dramatically in size. Ten thousand times, a million times, a billion times...

“What’s going on?!” Both of them felt perplexed and they simultaneously turned to look backwards. They saw a hole directly behind them; this was the hole they had just flown out of. As they had rapidly increased in size, the hole had shrunk in comparison.

“T-t-that’s...” Both of them were stupefied. Behind them they saw a towering, pitch-black humanoid figure lying on the ground. The figure was 540,000 meters tall, and a hole that was just a few meters wide could be seen over his chest. Clearly, the hole had punctured straight through his chest and into his body.

As for Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord, they had just flown out of this

humanoid creature's chest wound.

The two landed on the ground. They stared at the fallen, towering giant figure with astonished gazes. "W-w-we were actually inside its body this entire time?" Ning could hardly believe it.

"Those countless stone passageways we went through were just part of its body? Those flame demons and earth devils, and that powerful planet? They were all just part of its body as well?" The Ninedust Sectlord couldn't believe it either.

A grain of sand, an entire world.

This humanoid creature looked like it was 'merely' 540,000 meters tall, but within its body was an endlessly vast space that gave birth to flame demons, earth devils, and even mortal lifeforms! This was truly unbelievable.

"I don't think it was an actual living being. Actual living beings should have divine power and Immortal energy within their bodies, but it only had those endless stone passageways," the Ninedust Sectlord said.

"It doesn't seem to be a cultivator." Ning nodded in agreement.

They then began to carefully inspect their surroundings. This was an enormous cave they were in, and they were in just one corner of it. The two began to walk through the cave and inspect it.

"Look over there." Ning pointed off into the distance, a stunned look on his face. Far away there were two figures who could be seen. One was a white-robed figure who lay on the ground, completely unmoving. The other was seated in the lotus position, a peaceful look on his face. Both of these enormous figures emanated auras of incredible might, the might of a Hegemon. Ning had seen three Hegemon corpses in the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe, and now he had found two more here in this cave.

"Is that..." The Ninedust Sectlord stared at the two figures, his gaze quickly focusing on the man seated peacefully in the lotus position. The Ninedust Sectlord's body trembled slightly as he murmured, "An ancestor.

That's one of the ancestors..."

Chapter 32: The History of the Terror

Starsea

“Ninedust, so this is an ancestor of the Ancient cultivators?” Upon hearing the Ninedust Sectlord’s mumbles, Ji Ning turned to look curiously at the peaceful-looking man seated in the lotus position. The man seemed to be a world unto himself, and was filled with peace and benevolence. Just looking at him, Ning felt calm and tranquil in his heart. In addition, the ancient figure gave Ning a very strange feeling, a feeling similar to the one which the Ninedust Sectlord gave him.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that members of the same race would all share certain commonalities.

When Ning had first met the Ninedust Sectlord, he had no idea that the man was an Ancient cultivator. Once he met more of them, however, he would probably be able to recognize them at a glance.

“Yes. This is one of our oldest ancestors.” The Ninedust Sectlord walked over in a reverential manner. Ning followed from behind, inspecting the man closely.

There were two deceased Hegemons. The white-robed Hegemon simply lay there on the ground, and just by moving closer to him Ning began to feel as though the world around him was twisting and distorting into hallucinations. Fortunately, his soul and his mind were both very strong, and the effect was nothing more than a natural phenomena caused by the presence of the deceased Hegemon’s body. As a result, Ning was able to endure the effect. By comparison, the Ancient cultivator seated in the lotus position was much more peaceful.

After they moved closer, the Ninedust Sectlord fell to his knees and kowtowed respectfully. “Redwater pays his respects to you, ancestor.”

There was a dark-red longstaff to the side of the Ancient ancestor, and the aura emanating from it shocked Ning. “A Universe treasure?” He had seen the broken sword in the Sword Palace of the Brightshore Kingdom,

and had also encountered the deceased Sword Hegemon's dark blue greatsword in the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe. As a result, he was able to almost instantly ascertain that the dark-red longstaff next to this Ancient ancestor was also a Universe treasure.

Whoosh. A stream of light suddenly flew out from the dark-red longstaff, transforming into a bald, black-robed youth.

"Gentlemen." The bald, black-robed youth had a calm, peaceful gaze that seemed to hold all the stars in the night sky, and his voice echoed within the cave.

"Senior," the Ninedust Sectlord immediately called out humbly, a hint of excitement in his eyes. This was a Universe treasure! And a longstaff at that. He himself used longstaffs!

"Senior." Ning called out with respect as well.

Any and every Universe treasure was worthy of respect, because every single one was born after experiencing endless trials and tribulations. They were utterly supreme amongst treasures, and they would only submit to those whom they truly acknowledged. Otherwise, there was no way to control them whatsoever.

"You are the fifth and the sixth to come to this place," the bald, black-robed youth said peacefully.

Ning was secretly stunned upon hearing this. The fifth and the sixth? When they had visited Skywind's homeland, they had been the fourth and the fifth. It seemed as though there was another expert who had reached this place without entering Skywind's home.

"Since you have been able to survive and reach this place, it means that you both have had a number of fortuitous encounters in your life. Before dying, Master ordained that all Ancient cultivators would have a chance to earn some rewards from him if they could pass some of his tests. If there is someone capable of passing all the tests, I would be willing to follow that person," the youth said.

"Pass all the tests?" The Ninedust Sectlord's eyes lit up. If he passed

everything, he would gain a Universe treasure? In the past, he never would've even dared to imagine such a thing. It must be remembered that virtually no Eternal Emperors wielded Universe treasures, much less Daolords. Only the most ridiculously lucky of Daolords would ever have a chance to acquire a Universe treasure.

“Emperor Vulturas came to this place before. Did he fail the test?” Ning suddenly asked.

The Ninedust Sectlord was stunned. Oh, right. Patriarch Vulturas had completed his Daomerge in Skywind's homeland. After gaining eternity, he became a major power who was second only to the Hegemons in might. Had he failed to acquire the Universe treasure as well?

“Vulturas did indeed come here. He was the only Eternal Emperor to make it here, and he gained a prize for himself.” The youth nodded. “But passing the trials requires not just power; it also requires destiny. Vulturas and I were not destined to be.”

“Dare I ask, what are the trials?” The Ninedust Sectlord was rather excited. He was willing to risk everything for this. If he was lucky, he might end up with an Eternal weapon as the prize!

“All you need to do is walk closer to Master. Master set up formations and restrictive spells in the area; once you activate them, the trials will begin,” the youth said. “The better you perform, the more gifts you shall win for yourself. I shall be the arbiter of it all.”

“Understood.” The Ninedust Sectlord immediately walked over, moving towards the peacefully seated Ancient ancestor. Suddenly, he seemed to run into an invisible barrier. A few dimensional fluctuations spread out, and he disappeared without a trace.

The youth then turned to glance at Ning. He said calmly, “You are not an Ancient cultivator. You are not permitted to earn any of my Master's treasures.”

Ning nodded helplessly.

“I personally don't have any bias against non-Ancient cultivators,” the

black-robed youth said. “However, Master’s dying instructions were that if our side won the Dawn War, his treasures were to be left to Ancient cultivators and Ancient cultivators alone. However, if our side lost the Dawn War, then anyone would be able to win his treasures, be they Aberrants, Chaos Godbeasts, or ordinary cultivators like yourself.”

Ning was puzzled. “The Dawn War?”

“You do not know of it?” The youth asked.

“I do not.” Ning shook his head.

The youth nodded in an uncaring manner. “It was a war that caused the true downfall of the Ancient cultivators as a race. Long, long ago, the Ancient cultivators were born from the primordial chaos as the most perfect of all living beings. They unified the entire universe under their rule! Even the Chaos Godbeasts were enslaved by them, while the Aberrants were all forced to bend the knee.”

Ning nodded. He had heard of this before.

“Afterwards, as time flowed on, more and more ordinary mortal beings came to be born. Ordinary mortals expanded and propagated at incredible speeds, and thus they rose to power at an inconceivable rate. They quickly became a race that was second only to the Ancient cultivators in the endless primordial chaos, and towards the end they actually became close to a match for the Ancients.”

Ning couldn’t help but sigh. The Dao Alliance truly was formidable.

“But then, a disaster happened. This disaster was an extremely large-scale one. Many powerful cultivators in our homeland and even in distant places within the Great Dark were forced to join hands and fight back against this tribulation.”

“A tribulation?” Ning was surprised.

“Look.” The youth pointed towards the slumped humanoid figure off in the distance. “You just came out of its body. You should’ve noticed that it is different from ordinary cultivators.”

Ning nodded. Ordinary cultivators should've had divine power in their bodies. How could they have stone passageways, flame demons, earth devils, and strange planets?

"It was a member of our enemies, one of the most powerful of their kind," the youth said. "If we lost that war, we would've been annihilated. If they lost, they would've been annihilated as well. This was a war of extermination, a war for survival. Both sides fought like mad, and all of us here joined forces. Back then, our five Hegemons commanded a host of Eternal Emperors to fight back against them! Even experts came from deep within the Great Dark to reinforce us... and in the end, a great battle was fought in the place now known as the Terror Starsea."

"This battle was known as the Dawn War."

"Back then, we Ancients had a total of three Hegemons. The Dao Alliance had one Hegemon, while the Aberrants also had one Hegemon. All of them died." The youth continued, "An incredible number of powerful experts took part in that battle, and a steady stream of reinforcements came from within or beyond the Great Dark. The battle within the Terror Starsea was absolutely terrifying, and in the end I learned that the Dao Alliance, the Ancients, and the others resettled their homeland. This meant that the enemy had been defeated. We had won."

"The Dawn War was a severe blow to the Ancient cultivators. They had lost all three of their Hegemons." The bald, black-robed youth shook his head and sighed. "The Dao Alliance was actually the quickest to recover, and many of their experts eventually drifted into the endless Great Dark in search of adventure. Do not blame Master for being unwilling to share his treasures with you; he knew that you ordinary cultivators would recover far more quickly than his race would. So long as you were not completely wiped out, there would definitely come a day where you surpassed the Ancients. For him to show a bit of selfishness in caring more about his own race is normal."

Ning nodded. It seemed as though the Endless Territories had something of a secret history to it. No wonder the Terror Starsea was such a terrifying place; it had actually been the locale of the great Dawn War.

“So the endless Great Dark also holds many experts?” Ning asked.

“Yes, of course.” The bald, black-robed youth nodded. “There are many who have spent ages drifting through the endless Great Dark, which means it holds many powerful experts indeed. However, they are far too distant from us; even if you spent a hundred thousand chaos cycles travelling, you might not be able to reach them. Generally speaking, only Eternal Emperors would ever be so bored as to embark on such a distant journey. It was only due to how vitally important the Dawn War was that our allies hastened to the Terror Starsea, where the battle was to be held. The battle against our foes was so violent that even now the Terror Starsea is filled with countless dangers. Even Hegemons might perish here, if they aren’t careful.”

“Hah. There’s no need for a Daolord like you to know too much. In short, we wiped our enemies out and all the territories now belong to us once more.” The youth let out a chuckle. “In the end, our side on the Dawn War.”

Ning nodded slowly. It seemed as though in the past, the Ancient cultivators were actually an incredibly powerful force within the Endless Territories. They had three Hegemons! Alas, those three had perished during the war.

The Dawn War represented the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The era of the Ancients and their unified rule had ended; the era of the Dao Alliance had begun.

“Senior, am I supposed to just stand here and wait?” Ning asked.

“Yes, you can just wait here. There really is nothing here for you. The only reason you were even able to come here was because you were alongside an Ancient cultivator.” The youth nodded.

Chapter 33: Within the Cave

“Nothing whatsoever?” Ji Ning was rather surprised by this. He then turned to glance at the white-robed form. “What about the white-robed Hegemon?”

“He was the Hegemon of the Dao Alliance,” the bald, black-robed youth said. “During that great war, he died in battle but managed to deliver a heavy wound to our enemy. My master managed to follow that up with a lethal blow, but the enemy managed to heavily wound my master before perishing. My master’s wounds were so heavy that he knew he wouldn’t be able to survive, and so he left behind his legacies and his will for future Ancients to inherit. As for the Dao Alliance’s Hegemon, he didn’t have the chance to leave behind any legacies.”

“As for his treasures... well, my master naturally took them all and arranged for them to be given to future Ancients who could pass his trials,” the youth said.

Ning blinked a few times. But those treasures were the treasures of an elder of the Dao Alliance. I’m a member of the Dao Alliance!

Still, Ning could do nothing but grumble mentally. In truth, he understood what the Hegemon must have been thinking. Once the Dawn War ended, the era of the Ancient cultivators would have come to an end as well, and the Dao Alliance would become the new rulers of the Endless Territories. He naturally had to make certain preparations for the Ancient race.

“This place we are in looks like a cave, but it is actually a sealed-off estate-world which Master once used to trap and slay his foes,” the youth said. “There’s no way for you to leave this place on your own. If you wish to leave, I can send you off.”

“No rush just yet,” Ning said. This was a place where two Hegemons had battled an enemy to the death. He naturally had to spend some time inspecting it.

“Oh, right. How long will it be before Ninedust’s trials conclude?” Ning

asked.

The youth slowly shook his head. "I don't know. If he is fast, perhaps a thousand years. If he takes a long time, even ten million years wouldn't be out of the realm of question. Master truly did make meticulous preparations for his Ancient successors."

"I have some retainers with me. Can I release them here and let them take a look?" Ning asked. The white-robed Hegemon's corpse generated a powerful natural field of illusions; it might be of use to Su Youji.

"Yes." The youth said calmly, "But if they are not Ancient cultivators, none of them will be able to gain any of my master's legacies! Also, you are not permitted to cause any damage to the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. He died for the sake of our homeland, and so Master set up spells in the area around him. If any of you try to cause damage to his corpse, you'll suffer a counter-attack from Master's spells."

"Understood." Ning nodded.

"A final reminder. This cave is filled with quite a few vestigial scars from the battle that was fought here, and they might be of use to you in meditating on the Dao. The others who came here in the past also allowed their servants to come out and inspect the battlefield scars. If and when you are ready to leave, just notify me." The youth finished his words, then transformed into a stream of light that flew into the dark-red longstaff nearby.

The cave was completely silent once more. Ning scanned his surroundings. This was a place where two Hegemons had died. Ning still felt hopeful that there was perhaps some good fortune waiting for him here.

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Ning was now all alone within the cave. Ninedust had gone off to test himself against the trials, and so Ning had no choice but to slowly search the area for himself and see if there was anything useful for him here.

"I wonder where this enemy came from?" Ning returned to the pitch-

black humanoid corpse that was 540,000 meters tall. “It actually managed to kill two Hegemons. Its entire corpse is probably a priceless treasure,” Ning mused.

A small portion of the ‘golden sand’ from the shattered planet’s core had allowed Ning’s six Northbow swords to undergo an earthshaking transformation. Skywind’s home planet was similarly extraordinary. Ning surmised that the corpse probably held other unique things within it.

“Come here.” Ning waved a finger, attempting to drag the corpse into his estate-world. However, the pitch-black humanoid corpse just lay there slumped, not moving at all. Clearly, there was no way someone like Ning could possibly move it at all.

“Transform.” Ning’s body suddenly blurred as he expanded to become 540,000 meters tall as well. He was now the exact same size as the corpse. Ning reached out with his hands to grab the corpse by its elbows. Given that the target had died long ago, there was no way for it to resist him.

“Get over here!” Hands around the corpse’s elbows, Ning did his best to lift it upwards... but the corpse didn’t even budge in the slightest. Ning felt as though he was an ordinary man who was trying to lift up a massive mountain! There was no way to budge it in the slightest.

“Not even the corpse of a Hegemon should be this heavy. Still, it makes sense. I can’t even budge or shake the planets in its body. How can I possibly move the entire corpse?” Ning tried moving the corpse multiple times, but wasn’t able to so much as budge the thing. In the end, he had no choice but to give up. He couldn’t help but feel even more puzzled; how had this humanoid creature been created? Was it like a golem-type magic treasure, or the Hegemon of some sort of strange, unique race?

Ning spent quite some time pondering over the humanoid corpse. It obviously was an incredibly valuable treasure, but there was nothing he could do at all.

Should he go back inside? But even when he had been fighting alongside the Ninedust Sectlord, they had still been forced to use Dao-seals to escape

the corpse. Ning really didn't want to take on the risk of going back inside! In addition, he had the feeling that he probably wouldn't be able to find much within the corpse. The golden sand had only come out of the shattered planet's core because of the fatal strikes delivered by two Hegemons. Otherwise, how would Ning ever had a chance to get his hands on something so valuable?

As far as Ning could tell, the only wound on the black humanoid body was that wound across the chest. The other parts of its body seemed completely undamaged; it seemed unlikely that Ning would be able to gain much from it.

"What about the stone walls?" Just like the others, Ning ended up deciding to give up trying to move the humanoid corpse and instead began to inspect the walls. Might there be any treasures littered here?

None at all! Even if there had been any, the others probably would've swept them clean long ago.

Ning used his hand to gently trace some of the scars left behind on the walls. Although this cave was actually a top-grade Eternal treasure, it was covered with ancient scars from that long-ago battle. The emanations of the Dao radiating from those scars caused Ning to fall into a state of intoxication.

"These scars can be divided into representing three different types of 'intent'. It seems they pertain to the two Hegemons and the humanoid corpse," Ning mused.

One type of intent was an overwhelming, awe-inspiring, radiant intent.

The second intent was that of a furious, endless flood of water.

The third was that of a baleful metallic will. In terms of aura, the metallic one was actually slightly weaker than the other two intents.

"The intent of radiant light belonged to the white-robed Hegemon. The intent of water belonged to the Ancient ancestor." Ning was able to quickly verify which belonged to which, as the two Hegemon corpses continued to emanate waves of power and presence as well. "Then that

means the black humanoid corpse represented that metallic will. So it actually had a Dao of its own, and its own Dao was second to just that of the Hegemons.” Ning was rather amazed by all of these things.

Ning waved his hand, causing four figures to appear by his side. They were Su Youji, Pillsaint, Daolord Naia, and Daolord Bruteblade. After Ning had captured Daolord Bruteblade, the man had naturally submitted and chosen to serve Ning.

“Master.” All four of them hurriedly called out to Ning with respect as they looked curiously at their surroundings. They didn’t really pay much attention to the humanoid corpse, but the two distant Hegemon corpses caused all of them to feel stunned.

“Is that...” The four could scarcely believe it.

“Those are the corpses of a pair of Hegemons,” Ning confirmed. “Don’t just stand there like idiots. I came to this place alongside the Ninedust Sectlord, but I won’t be able to get any legacies from it. There are some battle-scars on the cave walls that you can examine which might be of assistance to you in comprehending the Dao. Youji, the closer you move to the white-robed Hegemon, the more powerful the field of illusions around it becomes. It might be of use to you.”

All four of them were completely stunned, but they quickly calmed down upon hearing Ning’s instructions. Ning trusted all four of them implicitly, because they had all sworn lifeblood oaths to him.

“Go,” Ning instructed.

“Right.”

“Scars of battle left behind by Hegemons?” They all began to explore the cave and inspect the walls. As for Ning, he lifted his head to gaze at the cave walls as well as he sought to better understand the Hegemon’s Dao. Although this wasn’t the Dao of the Sword, all Daos shared certain commonalities. Daolord Allgod, for example, delighted in training in all types of Daos. He had even trained in the Dao of the Sword! This was because all Daos had a chance to stimulate and enlighten you. There was no way Ning would allow himself to miss the chance to analyze the Dao of

a Hegemon.

And so, Ning and his four retainers began to train and meditate within the cave. Su Youji trained in the Dao of Fire, while the white-robed Hegemon was a master of the Dao of Light, but both Daos were highly suited to illusions! Mastery over illusions was not exclusive to Heartforce Cultivators.

“Incredible. This is absolutely incredible. Radiance... free will... how can illusions reach such an incredible level?” Su Youji was completely stunned and dazed by what she found. She was the successor of Feixian the Exalted, and was a true master of the art of illusions and charm. However, she wasn’t even close to being a match for this Hegemon. The mere illusory ripples generated by the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse filled her with indescribable awe.

“Master, Master! Come over here, quickly!” After meditating for five months, Su Youji began to call out for Ning.

“Eh?” Ning had been seated in the lotus position, staring at the cave walls. He turned his head to look at Su Youji.

Chapter 34: Allworlds Tribulation

The cave had been completely silent, with Ji Ning and the other three retainers completely absorbed in the profound mysteries of the Dao contained within the scars on the wall. Su Youji's sudden shout startled all four of them, and they turned to look at her as she ran towards Ning, her face filled with excitement.

"What is it, Youji?" Ning rose to his feet and began to walk towards her.

"The white-robed Hegemon was absolutely incredible. He's just... just..." Su Youji was so excited she could barely speak properly. "Master, you have to test it out for yourself."

"Of course he was incredible. He was a Hegemon!" Ning looked at her. "When I moved towards him, I could sense the field of illusions surrounding him. That's why I told you to go to him and meditate there."

"That's not it!" Su Youji repeatedly shook her head. "Master, you probably didn't move too close to the Hegemon's body, right?"

"I did not." Ning shook his head. As soon as he sensed the field of illusions start to affect him, he immediately elected to keep a safe distance from it.

"Master, if you had moved closer you would've found out for yourself." Su Youji said quickly, "The closer you are, the more marvelous those illusions are. My master, Feixian the Exalted, was skilled in the arts of charm and control, and she was also incredibly skilled in the art of illusions. Do you know what the apex of mastery over illusions is?"

"The apex?" Ning frowned.

"The apex of illusions... is reality!" Su Youji's eyes were filled with excitement. "With but a thought, you can create illusions that are as real as reality itself. That represents the utmost apex of mastery over illusions, a level at which even most Eternal Emperors wouldn't be able to tell the illusions apart from reality and thus would easily die within the dream. I feel certain that this white-robed Hegemon's mastery over illusions must

have reached this level.

Ning's face paled slightly. The apex of illusions was reality? If you couldn't even tell the illusions apart from reality, then it really would be easy for you to perish.

"The closer I moved towards him, the more real the illusions became," Su Youji said. "Although this Hegemon died long ago and these illusions are naturally generated by his corpse, I can tell just how terrifying his mastery over illusions must have been when he was alive. I'm fairly weak, and so I wasn't able to move much closer to him. You are much stronger than me, Master. I'm sure that once you move close to him, you'll experience for yourself the illusions which are as real as reality itself. Given that the Hegemon has already died, these illusions shouldn't prove to be much of a threat to you."

"Master, you have to go test it out for yourself." Su Youji looked at Ning eagerly.

"Reality, eh?" Ning felt rather intrigued as well.

"After you experience it personally, you have to describe it for me. I have the feeling that my mastery over illusions is already close to that of my own master, Feixian the Exalted. It would be incredible if I could surpass her in this area!" Su Youji let out a sigh. "Thank goodness these illusions cannot attack people."

Generally speaking, experts who relied on illusions used them to mystify and trap their opponents, then delivered a mortal strike to slay them! The white-robed Hegemon, however, was dead. His illusions could mystify and entrap them, but there was no mechanism for actually killing them; the Hegemon himself was dead, after all.

"I'll give it a try." Ning walked towards the white-robed Hegemon.

As Ning moved closer and closer to the white-robed Hegemon, the illusions slowly began to fill his mind. Reality began to gradually dissipate, replaced by illusions which began to seep into Ning's mind. However, Ning's azureflower mist energy had only grown even more pure after he became a Daolord of the Second Step, which meant that his soul

was naturally on a higher level than that of most Daolords of the Fourth Step. Given that his heartforce was at the verge of the sixth stage, he really was quite skilled in resisting illusions.

“Impressive.” Ning continued his advance. Reality around him was beginning to fade away, while the illusions were becoming increasingly real. Dazzling women appeared by his side, as did rare magic treasures and vile demons...

“I can actually no longer tell apart what is real and what is not.” Ning remained clear-minded, but he could no longer see any flaws in the illusions. He was now completely surrounded by illusory images, with a group of seductive beauties carrying platters of wine and food towards him.

“Break!” Ning’s Dao-heart could not be shaken by such things, and so he forcibly dispelled the illusions around him. But as he continued to advance towards the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse, the illusions came sweeping towards him once more. This time, they were even more persistent and pervasive.

“If I was in an actual life-or-death battle, illusions on this level would be able to affect me for a brief period of time... and during that brief moment, I would probably be struck and even killed.” Ning was secretly amazed. What terrifying illusions! Thankfully, the white-robed Hegemon was already dead. It didn’t matter how long the illusions were able to trap him for; the only thing that mattered was that he could still awaken from them, given enough time.

.....

“Master is as impressive as always.” Su Youji watched as Ning advanced towards the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse. She couldn’t help but feel rather excited by his progress. “He really is incredible. He’s made it much farther than I did, and is much closer to the Hegemon’s corpse. I already reached my limit much earlier; if I tried to proceed, my will and mind would’ve grown blurry.”

Su Youji knew very well that when surrounded by passive illusions, she

could allow herself to be trapped by them but her soul and her mind had to maintain a minimum level of clarity. If she couldn't even do that, then she would gradually forget who she even was and would be forever trapped in an illusory world, never to escape.

.....

Ning was finding it harder and harder to resist the illusions as well.

"Break. Break. Break!" Ning had to spend two full seconds in order to forcibly dispel the illusions this time. A stunned look was in his eyes. This was absolutely terrifying.

Two full seconds? In a fight at his level, he would've died countless times over by now.

"I'm going to keep advancing. I want to see just how powerful these illusions can become." Ning's Dao-heart remained unaffected, and his soul and his mind remained quite clear. Even though he was finding it harder and harder to break free from the illusions, he still knew that he was Ji Ning of the Three Realms. So long as his mind was still intact, he could continue advancing. As soon as he felt his mind begin to slip, he would immediately begin to withdraw!

BOOM!

As Ning took another step forward, the surrounding illusions suddenly seemed to explode and transform. The world he was in was a world of singing birds and fragrant flowers. He was in a village within a beautiful mountain valley. The forests had a few villagers within them, and Ning was an ordinary village youth who made his living as a woodcutter...

"This illusion..." Ning was dressed in rough clothes and had a woodcutter's axe over his shoulders. He stared at his surroundings, puzzled.

Off in the distance was a stream of water that looked clear and refreshing, with a few small fish swimming about in it. He could make out every single scale with perfect clarity.

Next to him was a stalk of bamboo, emanating a fragrant scent. Beneath

his feet was a patch of wild grass that was covered in glistening, jewel-like dew.

“Erbao! Erbao!” An old woman’s voice rang out from afar.

“Mom’s calling to me.” This thought suddenly entered Ning’s mind.

“This illusion is absolutely terrifying. I feel as though I’ve been reborn into a new life and a new world.” Ning was stunned. “Everything seems so completely real. The smiles of the villagers, the movements of the fish, the aura of the natural world... everything seems perfectly real.” This really did seem like an actual, real world.

“Break for me!” Ning’s will was roaring loudly. BOOM! The illusory world trembled for a brief moment. The distant woman, the villagers, and even the village dogs all twisted and distorted for a brief instant.

“I said break!” Ning’s will bellowed out again. “Break! Break! Break!” Ning’s will continued to bellow furiously. He was still clear-minded. Although his will was bound and constrained by this illusory world, Ning still had the power to struggle to break free.

Rumble...

Finally, the illusory world shattered into tiny pieces.

“I took eighteen full seconds before I was able to escape?” Ning was rather stunned. He was incredibly strong in terms of resisting illusions, even amongst elite Daolords, but he had still been trapped for nearly twenty seconds before breaking free. This Hegemon was simply terrifying.

“Another step.” Ning took another step forwards. “Hmm. Have I reached the end?” Ning continued to advance, only to find that the power of the illusions had ceased to increase. No matter how further he advanced, the power did no change in the slightest. By now, Ning was less than three meters away from the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse. He was prevented from advancing any further by a formation, but the power of the illusions didn’t increase at all.

“Master, you were able to make it to the Hegemon’s corpse?” The distant Su Youji was rather excited.

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “I’ll meditate for a time. No need to disturb me.”

“Understood.” Su Youji nodded.

Things were actually still quite tough for Ning, because he was being repeatedly swept up into the illusions and forced to repeatedly break free from them. “These illusions were merely created by the Hegemon’s corpse. If he was still alive, how terrifying would his illusions be? And these illusions truly are marvelous. I can’t see any flaws in them whatsoever; they look just the same as reality itself. Fortunately, my soul is strong enough that I can maintain a modicum of clarity.”

Ning sat down in the lotus position, no longer fighting back against the illusions and allowing himself to be swept into that illusory world. “Each time I enter this illusion, I feel as though I’ve been reborn into a new world. I can’t see any flaws in the illusions at all and have to struggle to free myself. This is a good way to temper my Dao-heart and strengthen my mind. Perhaps it will be of assistance to me in breaking through to the sixth stage of heartforce.”

What Ning did not realize was that this white-robed Hegemon had used his ultimate mastery of the Dao of Light to develop his own technique, the ‘Allworld Tribulation’, and then used it to gain eternity for himself! As soon as he broke through to the Eternal level, he became a Hegemon! As a Daolord, he was a terrifyingly strong figure who had merged together two Supreme Daos. After finally mastering his own ultimate Dao, the Allworld Tribulation, he had become a truly terrifying Hegemon.

After he died, his eternal corpse naturally continued to hold some of the power and aura of his Allworld Tribulation within it. When he was still alive, the natural illusions emanating from his body would’ve completely swept Ning into their grasp. He would’ve forgotten himself, forever lost within the illusions.

The remaining power in his corpse was nothing more than a tiny fraction of the true power this Hegemon had once wielded.

Chapter 35: Heartforce, Stage Six – World

Ji Ning was completely absorbed by the Allworld Tribulation's illusions.

.....

Ning became a fisherman's child. When he was young, he would accompany his father in fishing on the sea. He eventually fell in love with a rich man's daughter, but her family looked down upon him. On one seafaring voyage, his father ended up perishing, resulting in Ning braving the oceans by himself. Slowly, the clever Ning learned more and more tricks for catching fish. He gradually accumulated a fortune, then purchased a large ship for himself. As his fishing skills continued to improve, he became a legend amongst fisherman. He eventually had over a hundred sails within his fleet, and the rich girl's family actually came to him to make amends.

This was a world without cultivation. His life was an ordinary one, and it started with him being a youth who slowly grew up, becoming a towering figure by his middle years and the patriarch of an incredibly strong and stable clan in his late years.

.....

Ning became a peerless swordsman. His sword was the number one sword of the world, and his speed surpassed everyone's imaginations.

The reason why he had returned from his drifting adventures on the oceans was because he wished to find his birth parents. Thanks to a medallion he had carried with him his entire life, he finally discovered his parents. When he was young, they had been pursued by a group of enemies and so they were forced to abandon him in front of a rich family's doorstep. Eventually, his parents had found a place to hide. They had quietly trained until they became incredibly powerful. They killed their foes, then established a mountain villa and had many other children and even grandchildren.

And right at this moment, Ning finally came back to them as well...

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Ning became a physician's apprentice, earnestly following his master in the practice of medicine. He lived a very ordinary life, and the physician's daughter ended up marrying him. His skill in medicine eventually surpassed his master's, and his fame and reputation quickly spread throughout the world. Although he suffered the occasional setback, with other physicians occasionally slandering him, his influence within the world continued to only grow greater and greater...

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Ning was a fiend, a true demon. His only ambition was to rule the entire world and force all of its many denizens to prostrate themselves at his feet. All schools and all sects had to bow before him... and those who refused would perish!

The fiendish Ning set up his own organization, and within its domain he was the master of all. No one dared to violate his command! Slowly, his area of influence began to spread as he wiped out the various other schools and sects nearby. His reputation grew greater and greater, as did his power. He became the undisputed hegemon amongst the countless evil figures of the world, and in the final battle he slew the three grandmasters of the righteous path. From that day forth, the entire world fell under his demonic, despotic might. No one dared to disobey him.

.....

One life after another. Each time, Ning lived a wonderful life. Even when he became a demonic deposit or a viledoer, he would end up becoming an invincible figure, a leader amongst devils who none could shake.

The righteous path? The evil path? An ordinary mortal? A rural nobleman? A robber baron? A low-key sect farmer who was actually the number one expert in his sect? A brilliant scholar who won the imperial exams and was given the title of 'zhuangyuan'? A down-on-his-luck scholar who encountered a fox-fairy spirit?

Each illusory life was like a form of rebirth. In truth, all of the illusory worlds were created by the Allworld Tribulation based on Ning's own

memories. For example, becoming a 'zhuangyuan' was something exclusive to the world of Earth in the Three Realms. Precisely because these worlds were all created based on Ning's own memories, they all seemed very comfortable and familiar to Ning, making it easier for him to be drawn deeper into them.

.....

It was all so real. Too real. Not only was it comparable to reincarnation, it was dimming his Dao-heart and his will! An ordinary Samsara Daolord's mind would've long ago been fogged over by the endless illusions, and they would've forgotten who they were and been forever trapped by the illusions.

If Ning had come here shortly after leaving the Three Realms, even he wouldn't have been able to withstand it. However, his will and his soul had been tempered and shaped to be even more unshakeable than before. He was always able to maintain at least a modicum of clarity. Although these illusory worlds were very real and held both love and hate, family and ambition and madness... Ning was always able to keep himself at arm's length. He wasn't seduced or led astray by the illusions, and his soul and his will watched in a detached manner as this all proceeded.

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"Flamefairy, Master has spent far too much time in those illusions. It's been nearly a hundred thousand years. You've already become a Daolord of the Third Step, but he's still in the illusions!" Pillsaint and Su Youji were next to each other within the cave, staring towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse and the still-seated Ning.

Su Youji gazed towards Ning. "Master was able to make it all the way to the Hegemon's corpse. Clearly, these illusions aren't able to do anything to him. There's no need for you to worry. Everything will be fine. Let us wait a while longer. If something really does seem to be wrong, I'll go over there and pull him out."

Su Youji had broken through as well. Her path had been that of the Dao of Charm and illusions to begin with, and the white-robed Hegemon's

mastery over illusions had indeed given her new insights and epiphanies. She had gained a deeper understanding of the legacy of Feixian the Exalted, and thus her rate of improvement began to accelerate rapidly. Thanks to a temporal acceleration treasure, she finally managed to break through to become a Daolord of the Third Step after nearly ten million accelerated years.

If it hadn't been for the insights she had gained from the white-robed Hegemon's illusions, she probably would've taken ten times as long in order to make this breakthrough.

Pillsaint remained a Daolord of the Second Step. The battle-scars on the cave walls were of very limited benefit to him. He was at a fairly low level of insight, and as such the intent of a Hegemon's Dao was mostly inscrutable to him.

As for Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteblade, they were both Daolords of the Fourth Step. Both of them were continued to ardently study those Hegemonic battle-scars, as they were of tremendous help to them.

"After becoming a Daolord of the Third Step, my soul has continuously increased in power. Given my mastery over the art of illusions, I should be more or less able to resist the remnant energy unleashed by the Hegemon's corpse," Su Youji said.

"Eh?" Pillsaint's eyebrows suddenly lifted upwards.

"Master..." Su Youji was startled as well.

An strange aura suddenly shot out from the distant, seated Ning. It was as though something had just been given birth to.

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One life after another. He threw himself into each life, allowing himself to experience love and hate, life and death. Each life was a wonderful one, as the illusions sought to drag Ning fully into that world and drown him within its lies.

However, each time Ning was always able to extricate himself. In the blink of an eye, thousands of worlds and lifetimes had gone by.

“Master, I’ve grown weary of the red dust of the mortal world. I wish to dedicate myself to the monastic life. Please accept me.” A white-robed youth was kneeling in front of an old monk within a monastery. But right at this moment...

Rumble... the entire world suddenly started to shake. The white-robed youth was briefly startled. He rose to his feet, scanning his surroundings. He looked at the old monk, then looked at the mountains around him. The entire world seemed to be within his gaze.

“It is time to put an end to this unending cycle of reincarnation,” the white-robed youth said.

Rumble...

The entire world burst apart, the illusions have completely collapsed. The world in front of Ning became clear once more. He was still seated in the lotus position within the cave, and roughly thirty meters up ahead of him was the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse. Although the power of the illusions remained as potent as ever, they were no longer able to affect him in the slightest... because the sea of consciousness within his mind had just undergone a fundamental transformation.

BOOOM!!!

A powerful tidal wave of heartforce shot out, drenching reality in its waters. Reality and illusions twisted together, coalescing into a single spot of light. This spot of light was almost like the Worldheart which every single chaosworld was born from.

The spot of light began to grow, and it seemed to contain a thousand planets within it. With a rumbling sound, an entire universe began to manifest inside of it as a new world was established.

This... this was his heartworld!

Heartforce, stage six – World!

Ning’s mind and heart had long ago been at the threshold of this level; all he needed was some more experience and insights, and he would have made his breakthrough. If it hadn’t been for this event, he probably

would've needed to experience many more things and seen more worlds before finally making his breakthrough. However, the endless illusory worlds of the Allworld Tribulation had allowed him to finally see through to the nature of reality. His heartforce vaulted over that final barrier, allowing him to reach the sixth stage. He finally established his own heartworld, a world where illusions and reality intersected.

The heartworld was to Heartforce Cultivators what the Jindan chaos region was to Ki Refiners! Only if you could establish a heartworld would you be considered a true Heartforce Cultivator!

There were incredibly few true Heartforce Cultivators. The experiences Ning had undergone in the Three Realms had given him tremendous mental fortitude, and he had always had an incredibly high level of comprehension... but in the end, he had still needed the Allworld Tribulation in order to make the final breakthrough.

“From this day forth, I am a Heartforce Cultivator.

“Ki Refiners train in Immortal energy. They are skilled in secret arts and magic treasures.

“Fiendgods train in their divine body. They are skilled in divine abilities and in using weapons in close combat.

“Heartforce Cultivators establish heartworlds. They train in heartforce and know many mysterious powers that can strike at an enemy's heart, slaying them with a thought.”

Ning nodded slightly. Ki Refiners and Fiendgods focused on reaching ever-higher levels of mastery in the Dao. Heartforce Cultivators, however, were different.

Heartforce Cultivators did not focus on the strength of their Dao; rather, they focused on the stability of their Dao. They needed extremely stable Daos and extremely stable heartworlds, as only then could those heartworlds continuously expand. The vaster a heartworld was, the more terrifyingly powerful a Heartworld Cultivator would be! A Verge-level Heartforce Cultivator could have a heartworld that was comparable in size to an entire territory!

Chapter 36: Heartforce Cultivator

Within the cave.

Ji Ning turned and left, quickly pulling away from the white-robed Hegemon's corpse.

"Master?" Su Youji spoke out."

"Master, what happened just now?" Pillsaint was very curious. Both of them had sensed that unusual aura rippling out just now.

Ning nodded at them. "I just established my heartworld."

"Heartworld?" Both Su Youji and Pillsaint revealed shocked looks.

"Heartworld?" Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteflame had been startled by the aura as well, and they were also stunned when they heard Ning say these things.

One only became a true Heartforce Cultivator upon being able to establish a heartworld. Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly rare! A powerful Daolord who also trained as a Heartforce Cultivator? He would definitely be dreaded by the vast majority of other Daolords.

"Yes." Ning didn't hide it from them, because they were his retainers. In the future, they'd be able to notice when he used his Heartforce Cultivator abilities to kill his foes.

"Do not disturb me." Ning waved his hand, causing the temporal acceleration cottage to appear. He then stepped into the cottage.

"A Heartforce Cultivator. Master has become a Heartforce Cultivator." Su Youji was rather stunned.

"T-this is incredible." Pillsaint, Daolord Bruteflame, and Daolord Naia could scarcely believe it. What none of them knew was that in the Three Realms, Ning had actually been even more formidable in heartforce than he had been in the Dao of the Sword. Even Subhuti had suspected for a time that he had misjudged his disciple. Was it possible, Subhuti had wondered, that his disciple was actually more suited to the path of

heartforce?

And now, he had finally established his own heartworld.

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Within the thatched temporal cottage, Ning sat down in the lotus position. The task before him was for him to fully construct the heartworld. The larger the heartworld, the more powerful his heartforce would be.

The creation of a heartworld was an extremely intricate task. When he had been next to the white-robed Hegemon's corpse, he had been constantly assaulted by the illusions and so naturally chose to move away from its area of influence before beginning this task.

"My own heartworld." With a thought, Ning began to visualize the heartworld inside himself. Although it looked like nothing more than a tiny dot on his forehead, it contained an entire world within itself. The amount of space that could be held within that dot was theoretically limitless; it was entirely possible for it to grow to become greater than even the Badlands Territory. Ordinary Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators would generally have heartworlds that were on par with an ordinary territory in size.

If you wanted to know how powerful a heartforce cultivator was, you could find out by looking at his heartworld. The heartworld of a master-class World-level cultivator would merely be roughly comparable to a chaosworld in size! However, Ning's Dao was that of a Samsara Daolord's, and thus he was able to break through and make it far larger.

Right now, his heartworld was a blurry, foggy region.

"Arise." A voice rang out within the world, causing the mists to begin to vanish. A continent began to emerge and spread out within the void, and a sky began to appear above it which grew higher and higher...

At the same time, his heartworld began to continuously draw in more and more chaos energy. Ning's chaos jewels continuously replenished his supply of power. Relying on chaos energy from the outside world would be

too slow, and he had more than enough chaos jewels. The amount of chaos energy needed to make this breakthrough was nothing to him.

Soon, the world halted its expansion. It was now over ten billion kilometers wide, covering an absolutely enormous amount of space that was comparable to a chaosworld. This entire world brimmed with sword-ki, as this was a world of the sword.

“Grow further.” Ning poured his first-stage Omega Sword Dago into the heart of this heartworld, using it to try and further expand his heartworld.

Rumble... the world seemed to change in color and darken. The land mass at the very center of the heartworld began to bulge upwards as the tallest mountain within this world climbed ever-higher, stabbing like a sword into the skies from within the very center. This enormous sword emanated the aura of the Omega Sword Dao, and it was also the physical representation of this Dao. It was now more than ten billion kilometers tall, and the might of its aura washed out throughout the heartworld.

The heartworld continued to expand at a furious pace, growing to be a hundred... a thousand... ten thousand times larger than before. The rate at which it was growing was truly staggering.

“It seems as though my Omega Sword Dao is quite well-suited for the creation of this heartworld.” A figure suddenly appeared at the top of the enormous sword-mountain. It was a white-robed Ning, formed by the manifestation of his will. “A world created using the Omega Sword Dao as the core is extremely stable, making it much easier for it to grow and expand.”

“Mm. It finally hit the limit.” Ning halted the expansion. This vast, endless world was so great in size that Ning couldn’t even see to the end of it.

“Again.” Ning began the final expansion, pouring his second-stage Omega Sword Dago into the core of this world. The heartworld had already been terrifyingly large in size, and now it grew even larger. The heavens grew vaster, while the earth grew deeper. The world stretched outwards unto infinity as the enormous sword-mountain increased in

height as well. It rumbled as it stretched upwards until it finally reached a height of more than ten billion kilometers in size.

Ning's chaos jewels were being depleted at a furious pace as they provided sustenance for his heartworld's expansion. Thankfully, this wasn't a real world, and so the amount of chaos jewels used up was still fairly negligible to Ning. If he had to create an enormous real world of this size, even a hundred million cubes of chaos jewels would be far from enough.

After another period of time passed, everything fell still once more.

"T-this is c-crazy big..." Ning himself was shocked as his mental projection stood there atop the giant sword-mountain, staring at this seemingly infinitely large world. Thankfully, he was the creator of this heartworld and knew everything within it... which was why he knew that the heartworld was roughly comparable to a full territory in size!

How vast was a normal territory? You'd generally have to traverse it through relying on spacetime transfer arrays. A single territory was far larger than the entire Brightshore Kingdom! The Badlands Territory had roughly a hundred thousand chaosworlds within it, but the chaosworlds were all extremely distant from each other. As a result, the size of a territory was truly staggering.

"Arise." Ning pointed off into the horizon, where a heavenly pillar suddenly began to take form. "Arise." Ning pointed to the other direction, with yet another heavenly pillar taking shape.

Here, Ning was able to create anything at all with his will alone. Soon, five celestial pillars had appeared at the ends of this vast world, and they embodied his Blood Drop sword-intent, his Shadowless sword-art, his Yin-Yang sword-intent, his Soleheart sword-intent, and his Heavenbreaker sword-intent.

"Come forth." Ning smiled as he stared off into the distance. The earth rumbled as chaos nectar began to appear, quickly pooling together into a lake.

Ning just laughed. He knew that all of this was imaginary, not actual

chaos nectar. “According to the legends, when Heartforce Cultivators reach the true apex, their heartworlds shall transform into true worlds. When that happens, the treasures within their heartworld will become actual treasures. If you form a heartforce Eternal weapon, that Eternal weapon can be taken out from your heartworld and used in combat. You could even created precious ingredients and make them real,” Ning murmured softly.

This was the goal of every Heartforce Cultivator... however, thus far no one had ever been able to accomplish it! In truth, the goal was absolutely ridiculous and unbelievable.

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This heartworld formed by his second-stage Omega Sword Dao was actually the size of an entire territory. In truth, this stunned and delighted Ning considerably, as only Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators were supposed to be able to accomplish this.

Still, it made sense. The heartworld didn't really require a powerful Dao, it required a stable one! The more stable the Dao, the better. The more stable the Dao, the larger the heartworld!

There were many powerful Daolords who had incredibly powerful and fierce Daos, but those Daos wouldn't be a good fit for establishing a heartworld. The toughness of a chain depended on the strength of the weakest link! If a heartworld was to be stable, it couldn't afford to have any weak links at all.

Many Hearrtforce Cultivators often wandered the universe, seeking ways to further stabilize and perfect their Daos. When Ning had come up with five Supreme Daos and linked them together, he had already formed an extremely stable Dao. Now that he had truly fused them into a single Dao, the Omega Sword Dao, he had created the most perfect and stable Dao possible!

The Omega Sword Dao was not only a truly ultimate Dao, it was also the most stable of Daos! It represented the absolute limit with regards to the Dao of the Sword, and it had no flaws whatsoever. A mere second-stage

Omega Sword Dao was already comparable in stability to the Daos of many Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators. The third stage of this Omega Dao would most likely put Ning at a level comparable to the most supreme Heartforce Cultivator Daolords in existence.

“There are differences in power even amongst Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators. Daolord Soleman, for example, is much weaker than the Palace Lord of the Heartforce Palace,” Ning mused to himself. “Daolord Featherdress, for example, was known as the most powerful Daolord of the Endless Territories during his time.”

When Ning had first been captured and sent to the Astral Islands, he had learned of the ninety-nine legacies it held. The top-ranked legacy was the heartforce legacy of Daolord Featherdress. Daolord Soleman couldn't compare to Daolord Featherdress in power; the later was once known as the number one Daolord of the Endless Territories! It must be remembered that not even the current Palace Lord of the Palace of the Heart was ranked number one in all the Endless Territories.

Clearly, there could be great differences in power amongst Heartforce Cultivators.

“My Omega Sword Dao is virtually flawless. The third stage might put me close to Daolord Featherdress' level.” Ning was delighted. In the past, Daolord Featherdress' legacy was useless to him... but now, he could make use of those heartforce secret arts.

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As a Heartforce Cultivator, he was on roughly the same level as Daolord Soleman. Even if he was a bit weaker, he wouldn't be that much weaker. He could be considered a second-tier Heartforce Cultivator Daolord.

In close combat, his sword-arts and his Northbow swords ensured that he stood at the very peak of power amongst second-tier Daolords.

When you combined the two...

Ning knew very well that there were now very, very few Daolords who could match a freak like him.

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Time continued to flow on. After Ning became a Heartforce Cultivator, he began to train in the terrifyingly powerful heartforce arts which Daolord Featherdress had left behind. His heartworld was built around his Omega Sword Dao, making his heartforce incredibly pure and possess strong offensive powers. Daolord Featherdress' legacy was a bit softer and more subtle by comparison, and so Ning used the information he gained from it to create some heartforce arts of his own.

In the blink of an eye, more than sixty thousand additional years went past.

"Hahaha..." A loud laugh rang out as the Ninedust Sectlord emerged, appearing to be in an excellent mood.

Ning had been meditating silently within his temporal acceleration cottage. He now opened his eyes.

"Haha, Darknorth, were you in training? I'm really sorry that the ancestor left no legacies behind for you. You waited for me all this time for nothing." The Ninedust Sectlord smirked.

"It seems you had a fruitful experience." Ning walked out of his cottage.

"The ancestor's path was that of the Dao of Water, and he also used staff-arts. I benefited greatly." The Ninedust Sectlord was extremely smug. "Jealous, Darknorth?"

"Maybe just a bit." Ning nodded. "This Patriarch of the Dao Alliance left something for me as well."

"The Dao Alliance?" The Ninedust Sectlord turned his head, puzzled, to look towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. "That one over there? He left something for you?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"But our Ancient Hegemon took all of his treasures. There shouldn't have been anything left for you." The Ninedust Sectlord was confused.

Ning just shook his head. If it hadn't been for the white-robed Hegemon,

it would've taken Ning much, much longer to become a Heartforce Cultivator. Although he had been at the cusp for some time, it was quite normal for someone to remain on the cusp for a full chaos cycle or even longer.

"Time to leave, Ninedust." Ning waved his hand, collecting the distant Su Youji, Pillsaint, Daolord Naia, and Daolord Bruteflame.

"Agreed." The Ninedust Sectlord didn't ask Ning about what he had gained. He instead turned to look at the Universe treasure, that dark-red longstaff, then said respectfully: "Senior, please send us away."

Whoosh. A streak of light flew out from the dark-red longstaff and transformed into the bald, black-robed youth.

The youth gave Ning a long look. The Ninedust Sectlord had been undergoing the trials and so did not know what had happened, but the youth knew exactly what Ning had been up to. Darknorth of the Dao Alliance had actually established his heartworld. The Universe weapon couldn't help but sigh. The Dao Alliance truly did have countless geniuses within its ranks.

"I'll send you off," the youth said. He waved his hand, causing a wave of power to surround Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

Credits

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